SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN THE PANDEMIC CONTEXT: INSECURITIES, VULNERABILITIES, AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

A GESTÃO ESCOLAR NO CONTEXTO PANDÊMICO: INSEGURANÇAS, VULNERABILIDADES E PROCESSOS DECISÓRIOS

GESTIÓN ESCOLAR EN EL CONTEXTO PANDÉMICO: INSEGURIDADES, VULNERABILIDADES Y PROCESOS DE TOMA DE DECISIONES

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to investigate and understand the challenges faced by principals and educational coordinators during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, reflections are made on the role of school managers and working conditions in the pandemic context. Next, data from an online questionnaire administered to 66 managers is analyzed to find out about aspects related to health, activities carried out and the school-family relationship. By presenting a comprehensive view of the challenges and strategies adopted by managers, this qualitative research contributes to understanding the main difficulties faced by schools, teachers and students during the 2020/2021 pandemic. The results point to the need to implement policies that consider the specific needs of schools in a context marked by exceptional and unique circumstances. They also offer insights that can contribute to the formulation of policies and practices in times of crisis, as well as to future research.

KEYWORDS: Basic education. Educational managers. COVID-19 Pandemic.

RESUMO: Este artigo tem como objetivo investigar e compreender os desafios enfrentados por diretores e coordenadores pedagógicos do sistema municipal de Presidente Prudente - SP, durante a pandemia de COVID-19. Busca-se refletir sobre o papel dos gestores escolares e as condições de trabalho no contexto pandêmico, por meio da análise de um questionário on-line aplicado junto a 66 gestores. O questionário possibilitou conhecer aspectos relacionados à saúde, atividades desenvolvidas e relação escola-família. Ao apresentar uma visão abrangente dos desafios e estratégias adotadas, esta pesquisa, de natureza qualitativa, contribui para a compreensão das principais dificuldades enfrentadas pelo gestores, escolas, professores e alunos durante a pandemia de 2020/2021. Os resultados demonstraram que a saúde física e mental dos gestores foi afetada. Além disso, as atividades desempenhadas sofreram alterações significativas. Houve, ainda, a necessidade da adoção de novas e diversas estratégias de comunicação com as famílias, bem como de enfrentamento à vulnerabilidade socioeconômica dos estudantes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação básica. Gestores educacionais. Pandemia COVID-19.

RESUMEN: Este artículo pretende investigar y comprender los retos a los que se enfrentan directores y coordinadores educativos durante la pandemia de Covid-19. Inicialmente, se reflexiona sobre el papel de los directores de centros escolares y las condiciones de trabajo en el contexto de la pandemia. A continuación, se analizan los datos de un cuestionario en línea administrado a 66 directores para conocer aspectos relacionados con la salud, las actividades realizadas y la relación escuela-familia. Al presentar una visión global de los retos y las estrategias adoptadas por los gestores, esta investigación cualitativa contribuye a comprender las principales dificultades a las que se enfrentan las escuelas, los profesores y los alumnos durante la pandemia 2020/2021. Los resultados apuntan a la necesidad de aplicar políticas que tengan en cuenta las necesidades específicas de las escuelas en un contexto marcado por circunstancias excepcionales y únicas. También ofrecen perspectivas que pueden contribuir a la formulación de políticas y prácticas en tiempos de crisis, así como a futuras investigaciones.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Básica. Gestores educativos. Pandemia COVID-19.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was an event of extreme magnitude and depth, which triggered significant transformations in different areas of society. Its occurrence forced humanity to face unprecedented challenges, requiring quick and effective responses to mitigate impacts and ensure the continuity of essential activities. Breton (2023) states that the pandemic triggered a process saturated with information, distributed between the technical language of public health experts, comments from journalists, publicity about the need to restrict people's movement, in addition to information about hospitalizations and deaths. This scenario involved measures that impacted movements and transformed lifestyles, in a context that involved a threatening and uncertain atmosphere.

In the educational context, the spread of the virus forced educational institutions to adapt quickly and diversely, aiming to ensure the teaching and learning process amid the restrictions imposed by social distancing. This challenging condition required the implementation of innovative strategies and the reconfiguration of traditional models, with the aim of ensuring access to education, as well as the promotion and development of students in adverse times.

At this juncture, managers played a fundamental role by assuming responsibility for decision-making and implementing strategies, seeking to ensure the continuity of educational activities. In addition to the necessary adaptation to new forms of teaching, they were tasked with the arduous task of ensuring the health and safety of students, teachers and staff. Understanding the actions undertaken by these professionals becomes extremely important for analyzes and reflections on the impact of the pandemic on education, as well as the procedures adopted to face that singular moment in history.

Taking this into consideration, our research group Teacher Training, Public Policies and School Space, linked to the Postgraduate Program in Education at the Faculty of Science and Technology of the São Paulo State University "Júlio de Mesquita Filho", Presidente Prudente campus, carried out a study, with a qualitative approach, with the objective of investigating and understanding the experiences and practices of school managers who worked in municipal schools in Presidente Prudente, during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. By applying an online questionnaire, we sought to collect data on the activities carried out by the aforementioned professionals, as well as on approaches adopted, challenges faced and strategies implemented with the aim of ensuring the continuity of education in the pandemic context. We therefore emphasize that this article presents a section of this broader research.

We seek to answer the question: how did school management work develop during the pandemic? To achieve the objectives, we counted on the participation of pedagogical advisors [7]and directors, who shared with us the challenges they faced. It is important to highlight that most studies in the context of education during the pandemic have focused mainly on aspects linked to teaching work (Alves; Martins; Moura, 2021; Baade *et al*., 2020; Bessa, 2021; Cardoso; Soares; Gonçalves, 2022; Carraro; Ostemberg; Kohls dos Santos, 2020; Lima *et al*., 2022). In this way, our research seeks, in a significant way, to fill this gap, focusing especially on the investigation of situations related to school management.

In this investigative path, we began our analysis based on relevant considerations from widely recognized authors in the field of school management, such as Dourado (2007), Paro (2012), Souza (2006, 2012). In general, these authors emphasize that educational management cannot be considered neutral, thus demanding a continuous process of learning and engagement that transcends the limits of educational practice. Although school managers have relative autonomy, they have the opportunity to establish and implement channels of participation, through which it becomes possible to learn about democratic dynamics and reevaluate authoritarian structures, enabling the involvement of students, parents or guardians, teachers and other education professionals. In the next section, issues relating to conceptions of school management will be further discussed.

The role of school management and the pandemic context

For Vieira (2007) there are differences between educational management and school management. Educational encompasses a variety of initiatives developed by different government bodies, both in terms of shared responsibilities in offering education and in other actions specific to each area of activity. School management, in turn, refers to the tasks carried out within the scope of the school, which fall under its sphere of competence. School management aims to ensure compliance with its essential purpose, which is to promote teaching and learning, enabling access to education as a right for all, as provided for in the Federal Constitution and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education.

However, it is important to bring these two spheres of management closer together, as their ultimate purpose has a common objective: to guarantee education as a "right for all",

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[7]In the municipal network of Presidente Prudente, the term "pedagogical advisor" is adopted. However, with similar responsibilities to the term "pedagogical coordinator", more commonly adopted in other educational networks and systems.

Joane Vilela PINTO; Yoshie Ussami Ferrari LEITE; Leny Rodrigues Martins TEIXEIRA; Tamara de LIMA; Augusta Boa Sorte Oliveira KLÉBIS and Simone Conceição Pereira DEÁK

aiming at the full development of the person, preparation for citizenship and qualification for work, as per defined in the aforementioned standards. For Martínez *et al*. (2023), managers must adopt a management model that responds to current demands, so that the school institution becomes a space in which teamwork, planning, management, participation, evaluation and strengthening of values become daily practices, including seeking continuous improvements aiming to rescue the social function of education.

Souza (2012, p. 159, our translation) problematizes school management, basing it on an approach that seeks to understand it not in its idealization, but in the apprehension of its implementation, carefully considering the areas of activity and their purposes. The author emphasizes that "[...] management is the execution of policy, it is where policy operates and power is realized". In this way, school management plays a primary role in defining the assumptions that guide procedures related to the school, at the same time as it is configured as a dynamic process of search, achievement, dispute, dialogue and sharing of control over the decision-making power that guides the institution's path. In summary, the coordination of school policy is the central focus of school management, the latter proving to be an operational extension of school policy.

Also in this sense, Paro (2012) presents a concept that emphasizes the need for school management to focus on the construction of a public school that contributes to the emancipation of students and, consequently, to the transformation of society. Thus, the specificity of school administration implies the unequivocal rejection of domination and exploitation of work, intrinsic characteristics of capitalist management, which, however, does not imply a renunciation of administration as a whole. According to the author, it is essential to seek ways to manage the school that guarantee both its internal efficiency, that is, the optimization of available resources, and its external effectiveness, related to the school's performance in relation to students and the achievement of learning objectives. In this way, managers, consciously or not, through their actions, can align themselves with the conservative interests of dominant minorities or with the historical and progressive interests of the dominated classes.

Despite the importance of managers committing to social transformation and guiding their actions in line with the interests of the working class, it is necessary to highlight, as Dourado (2007) points out, that political action can be influenced by regulatory frameworks that reflect orientations, commitments and perspectives that are more comprehensive than intra-school dynamics. In the context of the pandemic period, such situations became evident, since the directors, even aiming at a school oriented towards transforming reality, were compelled to

adopt some technical and conservative stances, as representatives of the State, executing policies imposed by the management bodies. School managers found themselves in a situation in which they sought to preserve the health and well-being of students, teachers and other members of the school community, at the same time as it was necessary to ensure the continuity of the educational process.

As technical and conservative stances, we refer, for example, to concerns about ensuring the maintenance of school procedures, in addition to caution in relation to making decisions that do not reflect the decision of higher bodies. Souza (2006) explains that, for the classic authors of school management, the director is seen as a technician, who mainly performs the administrative function at the school, providing means for the development of pedagogical work. This is a conservative vision, focused on administrative and bureaucratic activities, justified under the pretext of guaranteeing the efficiency and effectiveness of the school.

According to Souza (2006), critical authors affirm the indispensability of the political dimension in school management, since political positioning is important in redefining the school's objectives and methods, so that there is a reformulation in terms of curriculum, teaching and assessment methods, among other aspects. This would lead management to turn to the interests of the working class, aiming for social transformation. In the pandemic context, there are also authors such as Alves and Barbosa (2020) who defend the need to implement significant educational processes, even considering the demands imposed by social isolation. They believe that school management should present proposals that include challenging emergency educational plans, involving schools, students and families, in participatory democratic management, even respecting the necessary social distancing.

In the same sense, Firmino (2020) states that managers should adopt a critical stance in relation to the subjects involved and make decisions that benefit the community, such as dialogues for democratic decisions, expansion of participation, respecting the parties involved, without disregarding daily functions commonly performed. For the author, managers should be flexible during the pandemic period, observing situations that require an environment conducive to quality social education. Firmino (2020) mentions that challenges in times of pandemic, such as the emotional instability of students and families, should be considered a priority for teaching; However, this is different from the situations discussed in professional teacher training, both initial and continuing. Thus, this process of pedagogical guidance, required of teaching in times of pandemic, required emergency intervention from managers, who sought to take ownership of this new function.

Joane Vilela PINTO; Yoshie Ussami Ferrari LEITE; Leny Rodrigues Martins TEIXEIRA; Tamara de LIMA; Augusta Boa Sorte Oliveira KLÉBIS and Simone Conceição Pereira DEÁK

During the pandemic period, managers were pressured between meeting the demands of teachers, concerned about student learning, and demands from superiors, especially when filling out reports and other bureaucratic procedures. They needed to deal with the teaching demands arising from remote teaching, added to the demands and pressures coming from government spheres and society in general. Even if they understood the political role in the school context, the pandemic period represented something completely unusual, which meant that school managers did not have many options other than to follow superior determinations, adapting to new demands, adhering to policies designed exclusively for that time.

Methodological path

In the conceptualization of school management, we refer to the management team, constituted, in the case of the educational system in question, by the director, deputy director and pedagogical advisor. The study was carried out with managers from the municipal system of Presidente Prudente, who answered a questionnaire consisting of 61 questions, available on the Google *Forms platform*. Among the 66 respondents, only three said they were male, which is why we used the feminine noun "manager". The questionnaire covered objective and open questions, aiming to obtain information about personal aspects, health conditions, professional training and experience, available technological resources, remote working conditions and relations with the community. It was made available on July 19, 2021 and responses were accepted until September 23 of the same year. Before, however, we carried out a pre-test, aiming to adapt and improve the questions.

With regard to the ethical procedures adopted in this research, it is important to highlight that all participants completed the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE), which was the only mandatory question. Furthermore, the research project and other necessary documents were submitted and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) [8], through the National Research Ethics Commission (Conep), with the aim of ensuring compliance with human rights, autonomy of will and compliance with high standards of research, integrity, honesty, transparency and truth, as well as the promotion of democratic values and social responsibility (Mainardes; Cury, 2019). It is worth noting that, to guarantee the anonymity of the participants, their names and location were not disclosed. Such measures were adopted in order to preserve the confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

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[8]CAAE: 56061522.7.0000.5402

In order to get to know the managers, the initial questions aimed to characterize the profile of the participants and the following ones had the intention of obtaining a greater understanding of the decision-making processes, insecurities and vulnerabilities experienced by the managers during the pandemic period. In this study, the concept of profile is understood in accordance with the definition of Souza (2006), as the ability to analyze the different facets of a phenomenon, representing a set of general characteristics of this specific phenomenon, highlighting its different patterns. Profile formation occurs through the analysis of different types, seeking to identify and describe heterogeneity to classify into more similar groups, with the aim of understanding the particularities, differences and similarities between individuals (Souza, 2006). The analysis of the other questions followed qualitative research procedures, based on André and Gatti (2008).

Among the roles held by managers, 57.1% are pedagogical advisors and 42.9% are directors. The majority of participants are between the ages of 32 and 51, totaling 80.4%. Within this range, 48.2% are aged between 42 and 51 years. Next, there are 16% of managers aged between 32 and 36 years old, as well as those aged between 37 and 41 years old, which correspond to the same percentage. Between 52 and 57 years old, 12.5% of managers are found. There is also 1.8% aged between 22 and 26, as well as between 57 and 61 years old or more. Regarding marital status, 66.7% are married, while single women account for 13.6%. Separated or divorced respondents total 12.1%, and those in a stable union represent 6.1%, followed by 1.5% who are widows.

Regarding education, they all studied pedagogy. Of these, 4.5% are studying for a master's degree, 3% already have a master's degree and 1.5% are studying for a doctorate. The percentage of 21.2% also has another degree, such as Geography, Literature, Mathematics, Art, Physical Education or Biological Sciences. Regarding the time spent in teaching, the highest percentages are 47.7%, who have a professional career between 16 and 25 years. Next, with 12.3% each, are managers who have 11 to 15 years of experience and those with 26 to 30 years of work. In relation to the time of experience in school management, 85.5% have worked for 10 years or less, among these, 39.7% have worked for between one and five years. In summary: the majority group of respondents is made up of pedagogues, aged between 31 and 51 years old and with 16 to 25 years of experience.

Joane Vilela PINTO; Yoshie Ussami Ferrari LEITE; Leny Rodrigues Martins TEIXEIRA; Tamara de LIMA; Augusta Boa Sorte Oliveira KLÉBIS and Simone Conceição Pereira DEÁK

Health conditions: insecurities and vulnerabilities

The health conditions of managers were impacted during the pandemic period. In addition to the numerous responsibilities related to adapting to remote teaching, implementing safety protocols and facing uncertainties, school managers also faced significant impacts on their physical and mental health. The increasing pressure to make decisions and the need to respond to higher bodies, often with limited information and constant changes, were significant stress factors. They faced the challenge of reconciling the needs of students, parents, teachers and other staff, while dealing with anxiety and concern for the health and well-being of everyone involved in the school community, as well as their own families.

Furthermore, work overload and long hours dedicated to solving emerging problems and finding solutions led to burnout and mental exhaustion. The lack of time for self-care and dealing with one's own stress was also a common concern among managers. The absence of face-to-face contact and personal interactions, essential for building relationships and mutual support, contributed to the feeling of isolation and loneliness. The lack of a solid support network and moments of rest and recovery can negatively contribute to mental and emotional health.

Taking these factors into account, we seek to understand changes in sleep patterns, eating situations, stress and anxiety conditions, even numbers of contaminations in the family, risk factors and impacts. Among the respondents, 69.7% stated that they were not part of any risk group. With regard to the percentage of 30.3%, who said they belonged to some risk group, 26.8% had high blood pressure, 17.1% respiratory disease, 14.6% diabetes and 7.3% obesity. Furthermore, 4.9% were in the risk group because they were aged 60 or over.

Regarding changes in sleep patterns, 67.2% had altered sleep. When we asked about dietary changes, most respondents, 62.5%, reported changes and 37.5% did not suffer from any problems in this regard. Regarding the contamination rate, 78.8% did not contract the virus. Among the respondents who were infected, 18.2% recovered, 3% reported that they had sequelae and no one was in the recovery process during the period of the research. Regarding episodes of stress and/or anxiety, 78.5% experienced stress and/or anxiety and 21.5% suffered nothing.

Briefly, the results regarding health conditions revealed that 16.7% of participants who reported an impact on their health had problems related to physical health. Furthermore, 25% complained of both emotional and physical problems. However, it is important to highlight that a large proportion, that is, 58.3%, expressed specific concerns related to mental and/or

emotional health. This total, added to the percentage of 25% of respondents who reported having suffered from physical and emotional problems, comprises 83.3%. According to a systematic literature review carried out by Brooks *et al*. (2020), it was found that people undergoing quarantine reported a series of psychological problems, including symptoms of acute stress, anxiety, difficulty sleeping and emotional exhaustion. The researchers emphasized that the length of quarantine and the disruption of social connections may have played a significant role in the negative mental health repercussions.

Pancani 's studies *et al*. (2021) also pointed out that restricting people's mobility, although essential at that historical moment to stop the spread of the virus, may have put significant pressure on people's mental health on an unprecedented scale. The authors affirmed the indispensability of social relationships through virtual instruments in times of uncertainty and threats, to replace the support that face-to-face interactions allow. Furthermore, they argued that, in addition to attempts to prevent the spread of the pandemic, it would be necessary to adopt multiple forms of psychological support to manage situations in which people had few face-to-face contacts.

These conditions, in addition to those specifically linked to the managers' functions, were observed in the responses to open questions, when participants stated, for example, that: i) they were afraid of dying or losing loved ones, as a result of COVID-19; ii) anxiety and fear also manifested themselves because, at the same time as they needed to reassure teachers and family members, they did not have support in this regard; iii) there was anxiety resulting from the lack of routine, insecurities, excessive work and everyone being away from each other; iv) the pressure imposed by the Department of Education and the Public Prosecutor's Office was also a stressful factor; v) needed to undergo therapies to relieve tension.

Barbisch, Koenig and Shih (2015) explain that the need for isolation can cause a "feeling of collective hysteria", when fear and anxiety increase, as a result of the number of deaths, the increase in media coverage and the growing number of new cases. These factors substantially increase anxiety, with network implications that require other health measures. Still in this sense, the studies conducted by Lima *et al*. (2022) highlight the fear of contracting the disease as a crucial element, which triggered a widespread feeling of insecurity in different aspects of life, both from a collective and individual point of view. This fear impacted and modified interpersonal relationships "[...] a specific fear takes hold of individuals, 'the fear of the unknown' [as well as] the relationship between 'fear' and 'knowledge' or 'knowledge ' in individual and collective levels" (Jodelet, 2017, p. 453, our translation).

Joane Vilela PINTO; Yoshie Ussami Ferrari LEITE; Leny Rodrigues Martins TEIXEIRA; Tamara de LIMA; Augusta Boa Sorte Oliveira KLÉBIS and Simone Conceição Pereira DEÁK

Activities performed: facing new challenges

In addition to questions relating to the managers' profile and health, we also sought to find out about the activities carried out, working conditions and the technological resources available so that they could carry out their duties during the pandemic period. We verified that all managers had access to the internet in their homes and at work. Furthermore, we found that the majority, 75.8%, of the managers accessed both from their homes and the workplace. Regarding internet quality, 66.6% of managers classified it as excellent, very good or good, while 27.3% considered it regular and 6.1% said it was bad. It is important to highlight that the availability of a quality internet connection, both in the workplace and at home, was an essential aspect for carrying out activities during the pandemic period, since this fundamental condition allowed managers to perform their duties without connection instabilities.

Regarding the devices available to managers, we observed that, in their homes, 92.4% used notebooks and cell phones; of this percentage, 24.2% also used a computer. In the work environment, being able to select more than one option, 73.4% said they used a computer, 60.9% also used a notebook and 17.2% only used a cell phone. Regarding device sharing, 51.5% of managers did not share devices with anyone, while 48.5% shared them with other people. Of these, 19.8% shared with one person, 13.6% with two people, 10.6% with three people, 3% with four people and 1.5% shared with five or more people. It is important to mention that the majority of managers, 75.8%, purchased the equipment with their own resources. Regarding the ability to use technologies, 84.8% of managers considered it excellent, very good or good. On the other hand, 15.2% said they felt insecure about using technology, classifying their skills as average in this aspect. During the pandemic, managers interacted with different groups, with 93.9% stating that the interaction occurred with teachers, 71.2% with parents and family members of students, 69.7% with other managers and 27.2% with students.

Regarding the activities carried out by managers during the pandemic period, we chose to present the results through a table. The responses totaled 168, as the managers indicated more than one example of activities carried out. The table we provide presents a subdivision of the responses between pedagogical activities, which we attribute to pedagogical advisors, and technical-administrative activities, more common to directors. However, it is important to highlight that, ideally, there should not be much division, as the functions and actions of the managers are complementary to each other and not exclusive.

Table 1 – Remote activities carried out by managers.

Remote activities	F	%
1. Pedagogical activities		
Technical-pedagogical assistance to teachers / Monitoring and guidance of activities carried out by teachers / Preparation and carrying out collective studies	61	36.3
Contact / Service / Guidance / Meeting with parents or family members of students	18	10.7
Organization / Monitoring of school routine	7	4.1
Preparation / Organization of pedagogical documents / Construction of graphs and data sheets for accessing and removing printed activities	6	3.6
Research activities (videos, studies)	5	3
Class Council / School Council	4	2.4
Activities relevant to the pedagogical coordination function	3	1.8
Subtotal	104	61.9
2. Technical-administrative activities		
Email / Google Meet / Applications (WhatsApp)	21	12.5
Preparation / Organization and sending of documents	13	7.7
Participation in calls and meetings organized by the Municipal Department of Education	11	6.5
Administrative/bureaucratic activities and work	8	4.8
Reading regulations, decrees, resolutions / Printing some of these documents	3	1.8
Activities of the Digital Secretariat (SED) system	3	1.8
Meeting with coordinators (in the case of directors)	2	1.2
Others	3	1.8
Subtotal	64	38.1
Total	**168**	**100**

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

The tabulation of responses and categorization made it possible to visualize a diversity of activities carried out by the managers. The category with the highest number of nominations refers to meetings and meetings held with teachers, including collective pedagogical work hours for elementary school teachers (HTPC) and collective activity hours for early childhood education teachers (HAC). This category corresponded to 36.3%, probably related to pedagogical advisors. The responses provided a description of the following duties: i) reading, passing on and providing guidance to the group of school team collaborators on the guidelines and requests from the Municipal Department of Education (Seduc); ii) monitoring and guidance of activities carried out by teachers, available in the virtual room; iii) HTPC and HAC planning. These duties mentioned in the responses highlighted the diversity of activities carried out by managers during the pandemic period.

Comprising 12.5% of the total responses, we have participation in meetings through virtual rooms, such as Google Meet, monitoring and sending messages through applications such as WhatsApp, as well as reading and sending responses via email. Among the activities mentioned, the following stand out: i) checking emails and WhatsApp groups of parents and

Joane Vilela PINTO; Yoshie Ussami Ferrari LEITE; Leny Rodrigues Martins TEIXEIRA; Tamara de LIMA; Augusta Boa Sorte Oliveira KLÉBIS and Simone Conceição Pereira DEÁK

employees; ii) daily reading of the school unit's email; iii) individual assistance to teachers through WhatsApp, Google Meet, email and other communication channels.

In the third category with the highest number of indications, corresponding to 10.7% of responses, are contacts, assistance, guidance and remote meetings with parents or family members. With 7.7% of responses, totaling 13 indications, are activities related to the preparation, typing and forwarding of letters, requests, payments and services. Reaching 6.6% of the total responses, we found activities related to participation in Seduc meetings and calls, including meeting demands and training meetings with the coordinators of the central body.

The managers' responses revealed the challenges faced and the significant changes in their duties, compared to normal situations. The pandemic forced schools to adopt social distancing measures and implement remote teaching, resulting in a series of transformations in the way schools operated and how school managers performed their functions. Under normal conditions, they are generally involved in the day-to-day management of the school, guiding teachers, monitoring student progress, implementing educational policies and interacting with the school community. However, during the pandemic, these responsibilities were expanded, as managers needed to deal with specific challenges posed by the health crisis.

According to Santana Filho (2020), the pandemic shook teaching and school education, since the need for isolation of students, teachers, pedagogues, managers, changed school dynamics, previously based on coexistence, sharing ideas and knowledge, in the transmission of consolidated content and driven by secular practices. In the same sense, Breton (2023) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed to humanity that it has entered a phase marked by a tendency towards the gradual intensification of the uncertainty principle, as a result of ruptures in the past.

Coordinating the transition to remote teaching, providing guidance to teachers on best practices, ensuring access to education for all students and seeking solutions to minimize educational inequalities were some of the new challenges faced by managers. Furthermore, they had to quickly adapt to new technological tools and platforms. The experience lived in the pandemic context revealed the complexity of the work in conducting school practices in exceptional times, providing an in-depth understanding of the new, more complex and challenging dynamics of the teaching and learning process (Peres, 2020).

Seduc guidelines: decision-making processes amid uncertainty

Through this research, we also sought to obtain information about the guidance provided by Seduc for carrying out remote work, identify the different types of guidance offered and assess their relevance. Furthermore, we investigated whether Seduc offered specific training to managers and how these training activities were perceived by them. Another intention was to identify the main difficulties faced by managers during the pandemic period. Regarding guidelines provided by Seduc for carrying out work remotely, 66.7% stated that it was passed on. Within this group, 32.9% indicated that they were guided on how to use resources, tools, platforms, synchronous classes and tutorials. For 29.7% of managers, the guidelines were related to carrying out remote school work and the activities to be made available to children.

According to 15.6% of managers, the guidelines were aimed at participating in training through remote meetings, live streams or using tools such as WhatsApp. The remaining percentage, 21.9%, stated that the guidelines covered subjects such as documents and resolutions, study materials, planning meetings, serving families and actively searching for students. For 30.3% of respondents, the guidelines were sometimes passed on. Of this percentage, 45.5% reported that they were guided in relation to teaching, management and school organization. Next, 40.9% stated that the guidelines were focused on the use of platforms (Google Classroom and Google Meet) and holding synchronous classes. Furthermore, for 13.6% of managers, the guidance in the format of lives was considered tiring and contributed little to remote work.

In some responses, the managers did not explain the guidance received, but expressed criticism regarding the way in which this guidance was transmitted. They questioned the effective usefulness and stated, for example, that: i) the guidelines did not converge with the needs of that moment; ii) some advisors participated in training promoted by Seduc, but did not have mastery of the tools, which compromised effective transfer to teachers; iii) felt feelings of frustration due to the overload of bureaucratic tasks; iv) insecurity due to inconsistent, delayed and poorly prepared information. Finally, regarding the instructions given, 3% of managers said they had not received them.

Regarding the relevance of the information provided by Seduc, 56.9% of managers stated that the guidance received was relevant for carrying out remote work. However, 40% stated that the relevance was partial and 3.1% said it was not relevant. When asked to explain their opinions about this relevance, the managers presented the following justifications: i) the guidelines helped in the safe use of digital technologies, providing tutorials and guidance; ii)

Joane Vilela PINTO; Yoshie Ussami Ferrari LEITE; Leny Rodrigues Martins TEIXEIRA; Tamara de LIMA; Augusta Boa Sorte Oliveira KLÉBIS and Simone Conceição Pereira DEÁK

served as a basis for organizing remote work; iii) were objective, important, significant and helped to resolve doubts, although insufficient, late and with limited implementation time; iv) met the needs identified by the managers.

Regarding the offer of courses, workshops, mini-courses and similar activities by Seduc to the management team to assist with remote work, we found that 72.3% responded affirmatively, indicating that they had received specific training. Considering this percentage, we can say that there was a significant amount of training activities, since only 27.7% of managers reported not having received specific training offered by Seduc during the period. Regarding the percentage of managers who stated that they had not received training, we sought to understand how they obtained training or information to carry out remote work.

The answers provided were as follows: i) they sought help or exchange with colleagues, WhatsApp groups, teachers and more experienced managers; ii) learned in a self-taught way, carrying out research, experimenting, seeking training and exploring tools; iii) access to the internet, using resources such as YouTube and Google; iv) using videos from teachers and advisors as a source of learning. With regard to the guidelines passed on by managers to teachers, we found that 31.5% referred to technical guidelines for the use of work tools in remote teaching, such as guidelines for preparing activities, using virtual platforms, organizing the routine and study schedule, as well as instructions on how to access the Google Classroom platform. The following table presents all the answers.

Table 2 – Guidelines provided by the management team for remote work with students.

Guidelines	Freq.	%
1. Use of tools (platforms, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Word, *pdf,* tutorials, videos, *Power Point*)	30	31.5
2. Pass on Seduc's guidelines	22	23.1
3. Work in remote education (lesson plan, texts, content, activities)	15	16.0
4. Working with students and families	08	8.5
5. From experience exchange	06	6.3
6. General training / tutorial meetings	05	5.3
7. Synchronous classes	04	4.2
8. Returns	03	3.1
9. Schedule of work	01	1.0
10. There was no guidance/delayed guidance	01	1.0
Total	**95**	**100**

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Overall, these results revealed a variety of guidance provided by Seduc to managers to assist with remote work. Although a significant portion considered the guidelines relevant and received specific training, some points for improvement were identified, such as the importance

of greater alignment of the guidelines with the emerging needs of the pandemic, as well as ensuring the advisors' mastery of technological tools. Furthermore, among the main difficulties faced by managers during the pandemic were bureaucratic overload and insecurity.

Based on these findings, we consider that Seduc could have improved the guidance provided, taking into account the specific demands of each school context and promoting training that is more in line with the needs of managers and schools. Providing adequate technical and pedagogical support to managers is important, in addition to ensuring access to resources and tools necessary for remote work. By overcoming challenges and implementing improvements based on experiences, it would be possible to offer more efficient and inclusive remote school education, providing support to schools.

School and family: joint crossings defying the pandemic

The partnership between family and school, with strategies that promote better communication and greater participation of parents and guardians in the educational process, is extremely important in all stages and modalities of basic education, regardless of the period. Especially with regard to the pandemic context, we believe it is pertinent to understand how the interaction between family and school occurred during the implementation of remote work, in addition to identifying the main difficulties faced by managers in that challenging situation. Therefore, we investigated the specific dynamics that occurred in the context of remote work, seeking to understand how interaction between family and school was established, as well as what strategies were adopted to promote effective communication and how parents and guardians were involved in the educational process. Furthermore, we sought to identify the main difficulties faced by the respondents at the time.

The managers communicated with the families in different ways. Considering the most frequent we have: messages via applications (100%), virtual learning environments (96.9%), telephone calls (95.4%), social networks (76.9%) and video calls (52.3%). Other means were less used, such as letters (30.8%) and e-mail messages (24.6%). Additional forms of communication indicated (15%) were in-person assistance following protocols, home visits, video recordings, meetings using the Google Meet tool, active search and conversation circles between members of the school team and the family. From observing the percentages, we can infer that the managers made very frequent use of technological resources to communicate with the students' families.

Joane Vilela PINTO; Yoshie Ussami Ferrari LEITE; Leny Rodrigues Martins TEIXEIRA; Tamara de LIMA; Augusta Boa Sorte Oliveira KLÉBIS and Simone Conceição Pereira DEÁK

With regard to students in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability, who faced difficulties in accessing digital technologies and, consequently, school content, we sought to obtain information about the actions and strategies adopted by the management team to resolve or mitigate this situation. Among the participants, 45.6% reported that printed activities were available, while 25% carried out face-to-face shifts to serve families and students, in addition to holding meetings with them. Another 15.1% carried out an active search and referred students to the Complementary Actions Sector or Guardianship Council. Regarding the use of technology, 8% chose activities carried out through the Google Classroom platform, WhatsApp or email. Furthermore, 6.3% mentioned several additional answers.

We noticed that the management team sought to face the challenges of students' socioeconomic vulnerability through a set of actions. The availability of printed activities to 45.6% of students and the holding of face-to-face shifts for individualized assistance, as well as meetings with families, show the importance of these activities to guarantee more direct and closer support. These results highlight the need for diversified and flexible approaches, considering the particularities and singularities of students in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability. Therefore, they highlight the importance of diversifying strategies to meet the varied needs of students in this situation.

We corroborate the position of Fagundes (2020, p. 118, our translation), "[...] we can no longer admit a teaching process that results in more inequality and indifference". The managers identified positive aspects in relation to interactions with families. Through the following table, it is possible to view the responses that highlighted the importance of interaction between family and school in the context of remote school activities.

Table 3 – Positive aspects about family-school interaction.

Positive aspects	Freq.	%
1. Improved proximity, communication, interaction, partnership with families	26	41.26
2. Families were able to better monitor their children's development, progress, potential and difficulties	13	20.64
3. Greater appreciation of the work of teachers/educators, strengthening the bond between family and teachers/educators	10	15.87
4. Identification of families that value education	9	14.30
5. Teachers/educators worked hard and did an excellent job	2	3.17
6. Other answers	3	4.76
Total	**63**	**100**

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

However, negative aspects were also identified regarding the interaction between family and school in the development of remote activities. A percentage of 62.9% indicated that

families did not participate, did not interact and even blocked the teacher or school, completely abandoning their children's support in carrying out activities. Another 25.8% pointed out that families did not have the necessary technological resources, such as internet access, notebooks or cell phones, which made it difficult to monitor remote activities. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge on the part of family members on how to access virtual environments was also reported. Many parents did not feel able to help their children in this context.

Furthermore, 5.7% of managers stated that parents did not consider early childhood education to be an important stage, and many of those who had children enrolled in this stage of basic education did not attach importance to remote school activities. Finally, according to 2.8% of managers, parents said they did not believe in remote teaching.

Nonato, Yunes and Nascimento (2021), in a study addressing the school-family relationship, emphasize the primary importance of implementing policies that restructure and encourage practices that strengthen the bond between education professionals and family members. According to researchers, the partnership between school and family plays a fundamental role in the academic progress and educational trajectory of students. We agree with the authors, recognizing the indispensability of interaction between the school and family members or guardians for the integral development of students, in their cognitive, emotional and social aspects.

Final remarks

This text presented the results of a research that aimed to understand managerial work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that managers were impacted by problems related to physical, mental or emotional health. They dealt with various responsibilities, including adapting to remote teaching and making decisions under pressure, in contexts of insecurity and uncertainty. Managers also expressed fear of contracting the disease and concerns about increased media coverage and the growing number of cases, which contributed to high levels of anxiety and feelings of insecurity.

With regard to interactions between family and school in the development of remote school activities, on the one hand, favorable aspects reported by managers were highlighted, which emphasized the importance of interactions in the context of remote education. On the other hand, negative aspects were observed, such as the lack of participation and interaction of guardians and family members, blocks or abandonment of monitoring their children, as well as

the lack of technological resources and knowledge necessary to access and assist in remote activities. These aspects highlighted the need to search for strategies to promote greater participation and involvement of families in the pandemic context, as well as to provide adequate support and technological resources to guarantee equal educational opportunities.

Regarding the activities performed, it was possible to notice that the managers carried out a wide variety of them. By categorizing the responses, we identified different responsibilities, both of a pedagogical and technical-administrative nature. One of the main activities mentioned was holding meetings and meetings with teachers, monitoring the activities carried out and preparing collective studies. The managers also carried out contacts, assistance, guidance and remote meetings with parents or family members, seeking to maintain involvement and partnership with the students' families. In terms of technical-administrative activities, the preparation, organization and sending of documents, participation in calls and meetings organized by Seduc were mentioned.

The managers' responses revealed the challenges faced and the significant changes in their duties due to the pandemic. They needed to quickly adapt to new digital tools and platforms. The experience lived by managers during the pandemic highlighted the complexity of the work in conducting school practices in exceptional times, providing a deeper understanding of the new dynamics – complex and challenging – regarding the teaching and learning process. Such considerations highlight the importance of the role of school managers during the pandemic, showing their ability to adapt and support the school community, as well as the need for adequate technological resources and a stable internet connection to carry out activities.

Regarding the guidelines provided by Seduc for carrying out remote work and the managers' perception of its relevance, the results revealed that there was a transfer of guidelines by Seduc, covering different aspects, such as the use of technological resources, the execution of remote school activities and participation in training. However, some managers reported that the guidelines did not fully meet their needs, citing issues such as lack of alignment with the context of the pandemic, gaps in the training of advisors and bureaucratic overload.

Despite the criticism, the research also highlighted the relevance perceived by some managers in relation to the guidance received. They stated that the guidelines were useful for the safe use of digital technologies, organizing remote work and clarifying doubts. However, many considered the relevance partial, indicating the need for improvements and adjustments to the guidance provided. A significant portion still reported not having received adequate

training, seeking self-taught alternatives and exchanging experiences with colleagues. Given this, we understand that Seduc could have improved the guidelines, taking into account the specific needs of each school context and ensuring mastery of technological tools. Furthermore, it is of fundamental importance to offer adequate technical and pedagogical support, as well as necessary resources and tools.

From the reported experiences, we found that policies could have been implemented that would contribute to more efficient, inclusive and adaptable remote school education to adverse situations. Reflections and continuous searches for improvements are fundamental to guaranteeing an education of social quality and equal opportunities for all students, even in challenging circumstances. We also regret the absence of nationwide educational policies that, even while respecting local issues, could guide managers in a more qualified manner. Many times, they only had to exchange information and impressions, although they had enormous responsibility for managing management in the micro educational context.

Despite the adversities, we observed that the managers diligently sought to fulfill their duties, despite the requirement for a certain degree of originality and some improvisations resulting from the fact that there was no precedent for in-person removal so far away, in any historical period of national education, nor worldwide. It is worth noting that the lack of precedents required a lot from managers, so that the continuity of the educational process could be guaranteed. Certainly, analyzing the pandemic process, with the benefit of time, is a simpler process than the requirement to make decisions in periods of uncertainty.

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Joane Vilela PINTO; Yoshie Ussami Ferrari LEITE; Leny Rodrigues Martins TEIXEIRA; Tamara de LIMA; Augusta Boa Sorte Oliveira KLÉBIS and Simone Conceição Pereira DEÁK

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