

CHALLENGES IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT: NARRATIVES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND PEDAGOGICAL COORDINATORS

DESAFIOS NA GESTÃO ESCOLAR: NARRATIVAS DE DIRETORES E COORDENADORES PEDAGÓGICOS DE ESCOLAS PÚBLICAS

DESAFÍOS EN LA GESTIÓN ESCOLAR: NARRATIVAS DE DIRECTORES Y COORDINADORES PEDAGÓGICOS DE ESCUELAS PÚBLICAS

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses school management based on the potential and difficulties mapped by public school principals in a city in the south of the country. With theoretical input in Meneses *et al.* (2001), Lück (2009) and Libâneo *et al.* (2012) it describes the difficulties evidenced by the principals in charge in the function, so then investigate some ways of overcoming, also considering the work developed by pedagogical coordinators who work in the same schools. The empirical material, produced from a questionnaire and semi-structured interview, shows that school management is faced with many challenges, which are accentuated by the lack of participation and family engagement and the low motivation of the teaching staff. Despite this, some factors promote satisfaction to the management staff, highlighting the recognition of the school community regarding the work done and the results achieved, aspects that motivate the group to move forward in the management work.

KEYWORDS: School. Coordination. Direction. Management.

RESUMO: Este artigo discute a gestão escolar a partir das potencialidades e dificuldades mapeadas por diretores de escolas públicas de uma cidade do sul do país. Com aporte teórico em Meneses *et al.* (2001), Lück (2009) e Libâneo *et al.* (2012) descrevem-se as dificuldades evidenciadas pelos diretores em exercício na função, para posteriormente, investigar algumas formas de superação, considerando também o trabalho desenvolvido por coordenadoras pedagógicas que atuam nas mesmas escolas. O material empírico, produzido a partir de questionário e entrevista semiestruturada, mostra que a gestão escolar é atravessada por muitos desafios, que se acentuam com a falta de participação e engajamento familiar e na baixa motivação do corpo docente. Embora isso, alguns fatores promovem satisfação à equipe gestora, destacando-se o reconhecimento da comunidade escolar frente ao trabalho realizado e aos resultados alcançados, aspectos estes, que motivam o grupo a seguir em frente no trabalho de gestão.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Escola. Coordenação. Direção. Gestão.

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza la gestión escolar en función de las potencialidades y dificultades asignadas por los directores de escuelas públicas en una ciudad del sur. Con contribución teórica en Meneses et al. (2001), Lück (2009) y Libaneo et al. (2012) describen las dificultades que evidencian los directores interinos en la función, para más adelante investigar algunas formas de superación, considerando también el trabajo desarrollado por las coordinadoras pedagógicas que trabajan en las mismas escuelas. El material empírico, producido a partir de un cuestionario y una entrevista semiestructurada, muestra que la gestión escolar está atravesada por muchos retos, que se acentúan por la falta de participación y compromiso familiar y la baja motivación del personal docente. Aunque esto, algunos factores promueven la satisfacción al equipo directivo, destacando el reconocimiento de la comunidad escolar en relación con el trabajo realizado y los resultados obtenidos, aspectos que motivan al grupo a avanzar en el trabajo de gestión.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Escuela. Coordinación. Dirección. Administración.

Introduction

School management is addressed by many researchers such as Ferreira (2020), Lück (2009), Libâneo, Oliveira and Toschi (2012), Meneses *et al.* (2011) and Lima and Santos (2007). At the same time, building democratic processes in the management of public schools is on the agenda of many institutions. In this movement, public schools of Basic Education have sought to qualify their management processes to increasingly meet the specificities of their functions.

In line with this, we approach, in this text, school management from the potential and difficulties mapped by principals³ of public schools in a municipality in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and also from the perspective of pedagogical coordinators who work in the same municipality. Although our perspective includes parents, students, teachers, management, pedagogical staff and other employees in the process of democratic management of a school, this text is dedicated to presenting the routine and tensions that principals and pedagogical coordinators face in the exercise of their functions. With Lück (2009, p. 22, our translation) we understand that school managers:

[...] are the professionals responsible for the organization and administrative and pedagogical orientation of the school, which results in the formation of the school culture and environment, which must be mobilizers and

³ Although we are aware of gender studies and the implications of using the masculine to refer to the principals who participated in this research, we chose not to use the inflection in the term to have greater fluency in the text.

stimulators of development, construction of knowledge and learning oriented towards competent citizenship [...] Above all, they must ensure the establishment of a proactive and entrepreneurial school culture capable of autonomously assuming the resolution and adequate handling of their daily problems, using them as circumstances for professional development and learning.

Furthermore, Meneses *et al.* (2011) report that the principal of a school plays a complex role and that, in addition to being someone of school authority, he is also an educator and administrator. Although this perspective places a broad responsibility on the principal, we believe that his/her role is even more complex, since “the school has objectives to achieve and it is up to the principal to take the lead to ensure the achievement of these objectives” (MENESES *et al.*, 2011, p. 222, our translation). According to these authors, the director needs to be aware of the different sectors of the institution, as well as about the school's policies, in order to value their execution, in the reach of the objectives outlined by the school community. In addition, the evaluation of the results achieved also needs to be observed by the principal, since it is important to analyze what worked, what did not work or what could have been better during the school year.

According to Lück (2009, p. 22, our translation), it is the responsibility of school principals “to ensure the achievement of educational objectives, the good performance of all participants in the school community and the achievement of quality standards defined by the education system and national laws, state and municipal”.

In school management, the direction and pedagogical coordination have the functions of coordinating collective work, being at the service of people and the organization, democratizing decisions, sharing responsibilities, advising teachers by providing support and support when necessary, among others. In addition, they perform:

[...] the activities of coordinating and monitoring the work of people, involving the fulfillment of the duties of each member of the team, the performance of teamwork, maintenance of the work climate, performance evaluation (LIBÂNEO *et al.*, 2012, p. 475, our translation).

More specifically, the work of pedagogical coordination is mainly associated with the continuing education and advice of teachers (LIMA; SANTOS, 2007). Its function is also to include the school community in school activities, through debates and discussions, in order to always better qualify the educational process, as well as encourage the teaching group to develop their work in the best possible way, trying to help them when problems arise. Umemura and Rosa (2020, p. 90) state that the work of the pedagogical coordinator also

consists of opening and sustaining dialogues between the school community, thus being able to create engagement strategies around a common project and generate a democratic space in which everyone can intervene in decision making and problem solving.

Considering this, this text weaves an analysis that seeks to present the main difficulties and potentialities encountered by professionals who are in the role of school management in public educational institutions to, subsequently, present the work of pedagogical coordinators of these institutions, investigating what they think about the difficulties reported by the principals and how they understand that they help in these demands.

Methodological paths

This research is qualitative in nature, as it is concerned with deepening how we understand a social group, understanding and analyzing their experiences (SILVEIRA; CÓRDOVA, 2009). The analysis surface consisted of 14 public schools of Basic Education in a municipality in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, being 8 schools of the Municipal Education Network and 6 schools of the State Network. The total number of schools participating in the survey corresponds to approximately 94% of public schools in the municipality.

Of the schools analyzed, 12 only offer Elementary School and two offer Elementary School and High School. The empirical material⁴ was produced from a questionnaire with open questions, applied to 14 school principals, and through a semi-structured interview, carried out with two pedagogical coordinators who worked in some of these schools. With the questionnaire, it was possible to know the work routine of the directors, as well as to map the difficulties and potentialities found in the function. With the interviews, it was investigated what the pedagogical coordinators think about the difficulties highlighted by the principals and how they help in the demands of the school, specifically, those pointed out by the school directors.

With the material produced by the questionnaire, through content analysis (BARDIN, 2011), we performed different operations, which allowed us to describe, group recurrences and analyze the meanings that appeared in the speeches of the principals in each question. In the scrutiny of materiality, we built six categories to present the difficulties described by the school principals, which we called: *human resources*, *financial resources*, *faculty*, *family*, *students* and *job duties*. The categories were created considering the direction given by the

⁴ All participants were duly informed about the research and had the option to participate or not. The Free and Informed Consent Term (ICF) was delivered and signed in two copies, one with the participant and the other with the researchers.

directors in their speeches and evidence the impasses narrated in the role of school management. The table below presents the difficulties identified and their recurrences:

Frame 1 – Difficulties encountered in the role of school management

Categories	Difficulties encountered in school management	Relative frequency
Human Resources	Lack of staff and teachers	36 %
Financial resources	Lack of money that generates precarious physical structure	7 %
	Excessive bureaucracy in relation to public funds	21 %
Faculty	Dealing with teachers	14 %
	Unite and engage the teaching group to achieve the goals established in the pedagogical proposal	7 %
	Helping teachers motivate	36 %
	Receiving teachers who do not feel prepared	7 %
	Dealing with the lack of commitment and involvement of some teachers	7 %
	Dealing with resistance to change	14 %
Family	Dealing with parents	14 %
	Promote family engagement, participation and contribution to their children's school life	43 %
Students	Understand the reality of students and understand what they like, in order to integrate the contents to be more meaningful	7 %
	Dealing with lack of interest and indiscipline on the part of students	7 %
Job duties	Taking on commitments and responsibilities that often require time outside of school	14 %
	Have a vision of the whole, in order to meet the needs of all sectors, for the proper functioning of the school	7 %
	Dealing with charges from the school community	7 %
	Work with diversity	7 %
	Express oneself clearly so that everyone understands the same thing	7 %

Source: Devised by the authors

After the production of the empirical material through the questionnaire, we expanded the discussion on the difficulties and potentialities mapped in the role of school management, based on a semi-structured interview with two pedagogical coordinators who worked in two of the schools already participating in the research, which allowed us to investigate in a broader the challenges that school management imposes.

In this text, considering the empirical material produced, we explore the most recurrent difficulties in the narratives of school principals, namely: *promoting the*

*engagement, participation and contribution of the family in the school life of their children and helping to motivate teachers*⁵.

In the next section, we present an analysis of the most evident difficulty in the speeches of the principals: *the lack of participation and engagement of the family in the school life of their children*. In addition, we describe the work routine of pedagogical coordinators who work in schools, presenting the activities they develop and how they help in school management.

Family participation and engagement: a key factor for the efficiency of school management?

In the research carried out, based on the speeches of the school principals, it is possible to see that the lack of participation of families in the life of the school and in the students' school routine has a negative effect on management. Among the directors interviewed, approximately 43% point to this factor as the main difficulty encountered. Sousa and Sarmiento (2010, p. 8, our translation) state that:

[...] the school cannot truly play its role if it cannot count on family support. This is the one who best knows the potential, the specific characteristics of each student, being, therefore, the actor best placed to subsidize the school and the teachers with fundamental information for the development of more adequate projects and strategies, with parents continuing to be the first, permanent and most important teachers of children.

According to these authors, the involvement of the family in the school allows the child to feel more motivated and to be more optimistic and confident in relation to their learning, which guarantees the potentialization of success. For six of the 14 principals participating in the research, there is a great difficulty in making the families of students aware that in order for the school to achieve its educational goals, parents must participate and monitor school life of their children. The following narratives exemplify this:

Principal 5: *In order to achieve satisfactory results, it is necessary to unite the school group as a whole and this is also linked to the participation of parents in the school community; most parents do not participate in the school routine.*

⁵ The lack of staff and teachers was also a very recurrent difficulty in the narratives of the principals of public schools. However, we chose not to deepen this impasse, since in public schools, the hiring of professionals does not depend on the management team..

Principal 13: *The main difficulty, or one of them, is to make the community (family) aware that they are a fundamental part of an effective and quality education.* (our translation)

Considering that the theme of family participation was recurrent in the speeches of the directors, we sought, through interviews with pedagogical coordinators, to expand the analysis based on the work they perform, which allowed us to see the work routine of these professionals, the demands that reach them and also, how they analyze this difficulty mapped by school principals.

In the interview, we asked the coordinators, identified in this text as CP_M (pedagogical coordinator of municipal schools) and CP_E (pedagogical coordinator of state schools), what their routines are like and what demands come to them. The narratives below show that the demands of pedagogical coordination are mainly related to support for teachers:

CP_M: *[...] the pedagogical coordinator is a support, someone who is there to aid and follow the path.*

CP_M: *[...] the coordinator will help the teacher, will guide how he should proceed in situations.* (our translation)

Divieso (2017) states that the main task of pedagogical coordination is to listen and support teachers. Support and aid for teachers also takes place through continuing education, which, according to the author, is “as a way to improve the quality of the teaching-learning process” (DIVIESO, 2017, p. 24, our translation). Through it, it is possible to “ensure that these teachers can experience new situations and have the possibility to reflect on them” (DIVIESO, 2017, p. 24, our translation). Thus, pedagogical coordination:

[...] assumes the role of mediator of educational practices in the school space. This professional is essentially a teacher educator and, as such, also needs to develop skills and competences that allow him to assist teachers in this permanent process of reflection on practice, in daily routines, in proposing interventions, in organizing projects of interest for the school and the needs of students (ASSUNÇÃO; FALCÃO, 2015, p. 2, our translation)

The speeches of the pedagogical coordinators show that the coordination work is interconnected with the organization of the teachers' planning, in the work proposal, in the organization of pedagogical meetings, in the organization of meetings with parents and with the formation of students. For Lück (2009) pedagogical management is the most important dimension of the school, as it is related to the institution's focus, “which is to promote student learning and formation” (2009, p. 102, our translation). The author emphasizes that the work

of pedagogical coordination is also directly linked to the student, and it is their responsibility to promote:

[...] the actuality of the pedagogical processes, the contextualization of its contents in relation to reality, the methods of its effectiveness, the use of technologies, the dynamics of its realization, its integration in a cohesive curriculum [...] (LÜCK, 2009, p. 94, our translation).

In the interview carried out with the pedagogical coordinators, we also verified that the work they perform is related to the elaboration of pedagogical documents, important for recording the plans and actions carried out at the school. Furthermore, the work of the coordinators is also shown to be carried out in the intermediation between teacher and student, teacher and parents and between students. The following narrative exemplifies this dimension of the work of pedagogical coordination:

CPE: [...] *Pedagogical coordination has to be concerned with the School's Rules, with the School's Political Pedagogical Project, which is where all the pedagogical conduct, curriculum, planning, study plans, work plans are defined; it has to meet the bureaucratic demand around what the Maintainer requires, which is the production of documents around all pedagogical issues. Then, we guide the teachers, we mediate the relationship between the teacher and the student, between the teacher and the parents, between the students themselves, since all the relationships of the school experience have to be the object of attention of the pedagogical coordinator, as it is linked directly to learning.* (our translation)

Cruz (2018) states that the attributions of the pedagogical coordinator are related to the collective elaboration of the Pedagogical Political Project, with the continuing education of teachers, with the supervision and macro organization of pedagogical actions, with guidance for parents, students and teachers, among other activities, always bearing in mind the zeal for student learning outcomes.

In addition, another issue explored in the interviews with the pedagogical coordinators concerned the difficulty most evidenced by the principals of the analyzed public schools, regarding the participation and engagement of families. The narratives of the pedagogical coordinators reinforce that this difficulty is quite recurrent in schools and that the absence of families is increasingly frequent, as shown in the excerpts:

CPM: [...] *it is a very delicate situation that we are facing in all schools [...] the school coordinators say this a lot: [...] the family cannot be present, accompanying.*

CPM: *The vast majority of parents have an occupation, a very busy day, work issues, a thousand things, and it seems that they are not able to keep up*

with the pace at which their children are developing, children or teenagers. So, in fact, they don't know what to do, so they delegate to the school [...].
Our translation

When questioned about how they help with the issue of family participation and engagement, the pedagogical coordinators mentioned daily and continuous actions, but continued to point them out as a challenge. The CP_M said that to increase the participation of parents, an action called *Escola de Pais* (Parent's School) is developed, where each school in the Network develops activities so that parents can get to know the school and its routines better, such as workshops and lectures. In addition, they organize the Family Guide, a project designed and developed for children of four and five years old in Early Childhood Education, as reported below:

CP_M: *[...] this year 2020 we built the Family Guide for children education of four and five year old. [...] the children receive a book, colorful and interactive, where the classroom teacher creates actions to bring parents to school. [...] starting there in Early Childhood Education, I understand that the future result will be different. [...] parents will feel the taste of being at school, of participating, they will see the results and then they will be able to continue.* (our translation)

The CP_E explains that several actions can be taken, such as, for example, family day at school, meetings and formation for parents, events, reorganization of the Political and Pedagogical Project (PPP) with the participation of parents, among other activities. These actions seem to dialogue with the idea that:

[...] the search for alternatives for participation in the school context through thoughtful, organized and effective decisions, brings greater chances of success, through the proposal of increasing the participation rates of parents in meetings (FERREIRA, 2020, p. 137, our translation).

Despite this, the author also highlights the importance of the school holding meetings at times that favor working parents, in addition to providing times for consultations, clarifications and welcoming families at school, factors that are important for co-responsibility between family and school (FERREIRA, 2020).

The participation of students' families in the school can also provide the school team with satisfaction, as the work of these professionals becomes facilitated, supported and recognized (SOUSA; SARMENTO, 2010). This research also shows that for school directors there is great joy in seeing the entire school community participating and involved in learning and collective well-being. For most directors (42.85%), recognition from parents, students

and teachers is what motivates them to be in the management role, as shown in the following excerpts:

Principal 10: *Being the principal of this school is extremely rewarding. From the moment I arrive at school until I leave, every day. Students always look for me to help [...] and, at the end of the morning and in the afternoon, they always give me that kiss and a see you tomorrow. These demonstrations of recognition are the good parts, because those who choose our profession, know that we always seek the best for our student.*

Principal 11: The best part of being a principal is the recognition of our work by the school community.

Principal 14: *It's great to be a principal. There are many challenges and achievements, but the return of students is rewarding and exciting. The recognition of families with the care I have for their children. Anyway, when we carry out our work with dedication and appreciation, things happen in the best way we can deserve. (our translation)*

The principals' answers show that despite all the obstacles encountered in the role, recognition by the school community becomes the fundamental motivation. The affection received by the students, the bonds formed with the school team and the trust placed by the parents make the principals feel fulfilled. We have understood that this is an interesting point to be highlighted.

In the next section, we seek to develop an analysis regarding the lack of teacher motivation, an aspect also highlighted by school principals as a potent difficulty in school management. At this point, the pedagogical coordinators also contribute to the research, highlighting their perspectives and highlighting how they help in this demand.

Teacher motivation: factor that drives learning and school management

Working on some issues with the faculty is a complex task for the school principals who participated in the research. Several difficulties involving teachers were reported by management, and the lack of motivation is the most recurrent. For approximately 36% of the principals who participated in the survey, there is a difficulty in helping to motivate teachers, keep them united and committed to the school's proposal, in order to achieve the desired goals. The speeches of the directors point out that teacher lack of motivation is a challenge for professionals who occupy the management role, as we see in the excerpts:

Vice principal 6⁶: *The challenges of school management are daily. The biggest thing is to keep the group of teachers united and committed to carrying out the school's pedagogical proposal.*

Principals 11: *[...] the great challenge is to keep teachers motivated in the face of the current salary situation in which we find ourselves. (our translation)*

Teachers who manage to maintain a satisfactory level of self-esteem and motivation can more positively influence the teaching and learning process, because “if there are motivated teachers, we will have motivated classes, which will change the student's thinking and lead him to discover a series of reasons to learn the content taught” (MENDES; GITAHY, 2006, p. 105, our translation).

In line with this, when prompted to talk about teacher motivation, the pedagogical coordinators interviewed say that there is a significant portion of unmotivated teachers in the profession. Although we understand that public policies, such as the National Education Plan, as well as the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education, have in their core an appreciation of the teacher, according to the interviewed coordinators, teacher demotivation occurs, in general, as a result of policies that have treated education with depreciation, have devalued the work of the educator and have paid meager and parceled wages. Excerpts extracted from interviews with the pedagogical coordinators show this:

CP_E: *[...] we are undergoing a process that takes several years, a process that is historical, that demotivates the teacher. The salary issue is the main factor that demotivates the teacher. [...] the career issue and the way public policies have dealt with the issue of education [...] it seems to me that it is a depreciation of the school, teaching, science and knowledge, and this ends up demotivating the professional.*

CP_M: *[...] I believe that what teachers need is a little more consideration and respect for the profession. (our translation)*

Many factors seem to interfere with teachers' motivation. The research carried out by Mendes and Gitahy (2006) shows that the main causes are in relation to “the family’s neglect of children’s education, the little appreciation given by the government to the profession, indiscipline and lack of interest of the student in the contents and high workload to that the teacher has to submit himself to have a reasonable gain [...]” (MENDES; GITAHY, 2006, p. 110, our translation).

In response to this issue, when asked how they could help with the issue of teacher motivation, the pedagogical coordinators show that they seek to talk individually with

⁶ O vice diretor participou da pesquisa na ausência do diretor.

teachers, especially when noticing signs of demotivation, guiding them, when necessary, to seek help from specialists. The concern with the teachers is evident in the speech of one of the coordinators:

CPE: [...] *I think that the direction and coordination also have to be concerned with the teacher's motivation. With enthusiasm, mainly, to provide a good working environment at school, a favorable environment, with materials, offering possibilities so that he can recognize the value of his work.*

In the same way that we understand that teacher motivation can contribute to more positive results in the teaching and learning process, the motivation of people who occupy the positions of school management also enables better effects in relation to their work. Many school principals who participated in the survey indicated some factors that motivate them to develop management work:

Principal 2: *To be in charge of a school is to lead people and enjoy results that I also helped, participated, led.*

Principal 13: *The good side of our work is to see in the students, every day, that our commitment makes a difference in the lives of each one of them. And that, with that, we help to form better citizens, better people. (our translation)*

What this study shows is that although the directors of the public schools interviewed point out difficulties in the exercise of their function, they feel satisfied when verifying that the results of their work are positive. This shows that perceiving the growth of students in the face of their school trajectories seems to assure principals that the work of the school community is being more effective and, this factor, also makes these professionals feel more motivated to remain in their role.

Final considerations

This research showed that being in the role of school management is a task that requires responsibility, sensitivity, commitment, willpower and knowledge about the different sectors of the school: pedagogical, administrative, financial and human resources. We verified that, in the exercise of the function, the principals of public schools encounter many difficulties, which can be minimized, with the help of other people who are part of the school community, especially the pedagogical coordinators.

Among the difficulties most evidenced by the principals, the lack of participation and engagement of families in the students' school life has been considered an obstacle to be faced by the school, even though the pedagogical coordinators and teachers help in this demand through the planning of actions that allow bring parents closer to school. In addition, another very recurrent obstacle in the speeches of school principals was helping to motivate teachers, given the devaluation of teaching work and sometimes, given the lack of consideration and engagement of some teachers with the profession.

Although there are many difficulties pointed out by school principals in the role they perform, this research also shows that there are factors that promote contentment, such as: acquiring knowledge of administrative and pedagogical issues, learning from the challenges of each day, having autonomy in certain situations, being able to create bonds with the entire school community, enjoy positive results and receive recognition from the school community, the latter two being the most evident factors in the speeches of the principals. These and other factors drive many principals to move forward with their commitment to education, through school management.

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How to reference this article

BOFF, D. S.; ZULIANELO, I. Challenges in school management: narratives of public school principals and pedagogical coordinators. **Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional**, Araraquara, v. 25, n. 3, p. 2163-2177, Sep./Dec. 2021. e-ISSN:1519-9029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v25i3.14249>

Submitted: 29/09/2021

Required revisions: 28/10/2021

Approved: 15/11/2021

Published: 08/12/2021