

CHALLENGES OF MANAGEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS OF WATERS

DESAFIOS DA GESTÃO NAS ESCOLAS DAS ÁGUAS

DESAFIOS DE LA GESTIÓN EN LAS ESCUELAS DE LAS AGUAS

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ABSTRACT: School management is related to both general administration issues and pedagogical aspects. This article aims to present the work of school management in the “Schools of Waters” (School in riverside areas), located in the Pantanal of Mato Grosso do Sul (Brazil). For its development, the qualitative perspective was adopted, with a study of documentation, observation and interviews with the school’s managers. The data were systematized and organized in two topics: a) Characterization and Functioning of the Schools of Waters; and b) Curricular Proposal and Monitoring of Pedagogical Work. It was found that the necessary autonomy to carry out the management work is hampered by the insufficient material conditions for work closer to the community.

KEYWORDS: Schools of waters. School management. Pantanal of Mato Grosso do Sul. Diversity.

RESUMO: *Gestão escolar relaciona-se tanto às questões da administração geral, quanto a aspectos pedagógicos. Este artigo objetiva apresentar a atuação da gestão nas “Escolas das Águas”, localizadas no Pantanal de Mato Grosso do Sul. Para seu desenvolvimento, foi adotada a perspectiva qualitativa, com levantamento de documentação, observação e realização de entrevistas com as gestoras dessas escolas. Os dados foram sistematizados e organizados em dois eixos: a) Caracterização e Funcionamento das Escolas das Águas; e b) Proposta Curricular e Acompanhamento do Trabalho Pedagógico. Verificou-se que a autonomia necessária para a realização do trabalho de gestão encontra entraves pela insuficiência de condições materiais para um trabalho mais próximo à comunidade.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Escolas das águas. Gestão escolar. Pantanal de Mato Grosso do Sul. Diversidade.*

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RESUMEN: *La gestión escolar se relaciona con cuestiones de administración general y con aspectos pedagógicos. Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar prácticas de gestión en las "Escuelas de Aguas", ubicadas en el Pantanal de Mato Grosso do Sul (Brasil). Para su desarrollo, se adoptó la perspectiva cualitativa, con el estudio de la documentación, observaciones del trabajo de gestión y entrevistas con las gestoras de estas escuelas. Los datos fueron sistematizados y organizados en dos ejes: a) Caracterización y funcionamiento de las Escuelas de Aguas; y b) Propuesta curricular y seguimiento del trabajo pedagógico. Se encontró que la autonomía necesaria para llevar a cabo el trabajo de gestión se ve obstaculizada por las condiciones materiales insuficientes para trabajar más cerca de la comunidad.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Escuelas de la Aguas. Gestión escolar. Pantanal de Mato Grosso do Sul. Diversidad.*

Introduction

School management has been gaining focus on educational research from different perspectives; among them, there is the one that is concerned with understanding relations between management and differences in performance between schools, the one that intends to describe peculiarities of the school organization of a given reality, the one that deals with institutional power relations, among others. The variety of focuses and themes was recorded in a literature review on the concept of school management undertaken by Oliveira and Vasques-Menezes (2018), who found that production in the area migrated from approaches focused on administrative relations to those with more pedagogical and political content. In the text, the authors point to a gap related to research that addresses “the daily life of management and the subjects that make up the school community” (p. 878). Although the research that provides elements for the elaboration of this work does not have characteristics of everyday studies, in a way this article identifies itself with this perspective, as it highlights challenges of school management and aspects of building managerial practices in a peculiar locality.

The peculiarity refers to the physiographic conditions in which schools known as Schools of Waters are located. These schools are located in places of difficult access in the Pantanal, in Mato Grosso do Sul, and their permanence in these locations is influenced by the floods and droughts of the Paraguay River and its tributaries. During the flood period, some riverside dwellers move to the homes of relatives in the urban perimeter of Corumbá and others camp in tents in the highest and not flooded areas (CORUMBÁ, 2015).

In view of this scenario, this article aims to present the performance of the administrative-pedagogical management of the Schools of Waters, with an emphasis on the

diversity of situations and challenges faced for school organization in the riverside communities of the Pantanal in Corumbá.

Methodological procedures

The investigative path was guided by the qualitative approach, with a view to understanding the educational phenomenon in a specific context. According to Richardson (2017, p. 67), in this approach:

The research process involves the questions and procedures that emerge, the data typically collected in the participant's environment, the analysis of the data inductively constructed from the particularities for the general themes and the interpretations made by the researcher about the meaning of the data (our translation).

The Schools of Waters are administratively linked to the Municipal Education Secretariat of Corumbá (SEMED) and, for carrying out the research work, we obtained the express authorization of the executive administration, as well as their approval with Plataforma Brasil, Certificate of Presentation for Appreciation Ethics - CAAE: 25693219.1.0000.5160.

Data collection was carried out at the administrative-pedagogical headquarters of the Schools of Waters, located in the urban perimeter of the municipality, through: a) study of documents; b) observation of the management team's daily work, recorded in a field diary; c) semi-structured interviews with the Principal and the three Pedagogical Coordinators (hereinafter identified as CP1, CP2 and CP3), based on a script with 14 questions and an audio recording.

Table 1 shows the profile of the research participants.

Table 1 – Formation and Experience of the Schools of Waters Management Team

Management Team	Graduation	Postgraduation	Time in the Management of Schools of Waters
Principal	Pedagogy	Specialization in School Administration	15 years
CP1	Pedagogy and History	Specialization in School Management and Education, Poverty and Social Inequality Master's in Social Education	22 years
CP2	Pedagogy	Specialization in Basic Education Methodology and Art Education	3 years
CP3	Letters	Specialization in Portuguese Language	3 years

Source: Devised by the authors

In this article, we used data collected at the end of 2019. The information from observation was written out in this text as a *field diary record*. In turn, the information from interviews was transcribed and went through a textual production process, with the suppression of expressions typical of oral language, with the authorization of the participants.

The data were systematized and organized into two analytical axes, namely: a) Characterization and Functioning of the Schools of Waters; and b) Curricular Proposal and Monitoring of Pedagogical Work.

The Schools of Waters: between the peculiarities of the region and administrative regulation

The schools that are the focus of this article are located in the municipality of Corumbá, in the region of the Pantanal of Mato Grosso do Sul, which, according to data from the last Demographic Census, has 103,703 inhabitants⁴.

Regarding the education of the population, the Municipal Education Secretariat (SEMED) is primarily responsible for Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education, with enrollments concentrated in the early years of compulsory education (INEP, 2019). Recent data inform that in 2019 the municipality had 25,459 enrollments in Basic Education, considering the 63 schools of the municipal, state, federal and private networks. Of the total, 14,360 of them were under municipal dependency, among its 35 establishments.

The municipal school system in Corumbá / MS has peculiar geographic and historical characteristics, “with schools operating in historic buildings, where architectural accessibility is difficult, and others located very far from the urban center, with exclusive access through navigation” (KASSAR *et al.*, 2018, p. 302, our translation). Among these schools are the Schools of Waters which, in 2019, grouped five teaching units defined as centers and four as extensions, distributed according to the classification of the municipal administration (CORUMBÁ, 2015), in the regions of Lower, Middle and of the Upper Pantanal:

Table 2 – Schools of the Waters of the Pantanal of Comrumbá (2019)

Regions	Center	Extension
Lower Pantanal	Porto Esperança	-
Middle Pantanal	Santa Aurélia	São João
	Sebastião Rolon	Nazaré
Upper Pantanal	Paraguai Mirim	Jatobazinho
	São Lourenço	Santa Mônica

Source: Devised by the authors

⁴ Available: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/ms/corumba/panorama>. Access: 12 June 2020.

Taking as a reference the General Port of Corumbá on the banks of the Paraguay River, in the urban perimeter, approximately, we have the following distances: Baixo Pantanal - 280 km; Pantanal Middle - 180 km; and Alto Pantanal - 320 km (CORUMBÁ, 2015).

The distribution of enrollments in the Schools of Waters, in September 2019, took place with: 21 enrollments in Porto Esperança; 11 in Santa Aurélia; 34 in São João; 22 in Sebastião Rolon; 41 in Nazaré; 46 in Paraguai Mirim; 48 in Jatobazinho; 20 in São Lourenço; and 50 in Santa Monica. Altogether, the Schools of Waters registered 293 enrollments, representing approximately 2% of the enrollment set of the municipal education network, in the same year.

Although integrated under the name “of Waters”, not all teaching units are attached to the banks of rivers (MELO, 2017). In particular, the region where schools are located in the Middle Pantanal (Santa Aurélia, São João, Sebastião Rolon and Nazaré) suffered a severe water crisis in 2019, due to the drought of the Taquari River. Thus, even though the material conditions of existence of students and their families are similar - low family income and precarious access to fundamental rights (ZERLOTTI, 2014; MELO, 2017; OLIVEIRA, 2018; RIOS, 2020), the Schools of Waters have as distinctive mark their heterogeneity: of a legal nature, school calendars, means of transport, physical structures, operating regimes. Of the nine teaching units, two are governed by public-private partnerships: Jatobazinho and Santa Mônica. The first is the result of a partnership between the City Hall and the Acaia Institute; the second between the City Hall and the Escola das Águas Rural Institute (MELO, 2017; OLIVEIRA, 2018; RIOS, 2020).

The “school boat” and the “tractor with trailer” are the means of public transport, of daily use, for students who live in the localities closest to the schools; there are cases of students walking or on horseback to the teaching units, in addition to those in which family members make transportation using “voadeira” (small motor-powered boats).

The physical structure of the units, in general, is simple with two or three classrooms, with limited electricity and internet. The Jatobazinho and Santa Mônica schools (of public-private partnerships) have a physical structure qualitatively differentiated from the others (MELO, 2017; RIOS, 2020).

Characterization and functioning of the Schools of Waters

Until the final years of the 1990s, schools located in riverside communities were administered by all educational institutions located in rural Corumbá. As the Principal of the Schools of Waters told us, “before it was just one board that served all schools, from the

countryside, riverside, from settlements, everything. Then it was dismembered” (our translation).

The schools were, procedurally, being (re)configured with a view to specific attention to the different peasant populations in the municipality. According to CP1, the schools “were (re)divided to each government, each secretariat, each portfolio that entered there made a new division, a new adjustment and so it ends in the format that exists today of Schools of Waters” (our translation). According to the managers, the Porto Esperança Municipal Rural School constituted itself as the first center for assistance to other teaching units in waters regions, called extensions. For Oliveira (2018, p. 48, our translation), “the term extension is used to refer to schools that operate in separate units. They have a physical structure of an independent school, [...] however, in municipal documents they are linked to a center school”. The expansion of the extension offer, especially in the Upper Pantanal region, was due to the strategic action to combat child labor in the riverside communities (ABREU, 2018).

Rios (2020) informs that the nomenclature Schools of Waters will appear in some administrative documents from 1997 onwards. Zerlotti (2014) and Melo (2017) signal that the term has been used informally in local educational actions. However, we found some clues in the Municipal Education Plan of Corumbá (2015-2025) which, although it does not have a definition, does mention the education of the peoples of the waters, including curricula and specific proposals, considering their socio-cultural particularities (CORUMBÁ, 2015).

In any case, the management team explained to us that a municipal resolution is in progress in order to provide for the basic principles of education in the Rural Schools and Schools of waters of Corumbá. In this system, it is worth noting that, currently, although it has its own administrative-pedagogical team in the urban area of the municipality, the Schools of Waters are linked to the SEMED Rural Education Center.

The schooling offer is concentrated in the early years of elementary school and with a predominance of multigrade classes. Even so, there are several specificities between the teaching units. In 2019, according to demand, some also offered the stage of Early Childhood Education (Pre-School) - Porto Esperança, São João, Jatobazinho and Paraguai Mirim - and the final years of Elementary Education - Porto Esperança, Santa Aurélia, São João, Sebastião Rolon, Nazaré, Paraguai Mirim and São Lourenço. With regard to the formation of classes, with the exception of Jatobazinho, which was organized by grade and Santa Monica by grade/bi-grades, in the other teaching units the formation took place by multigrade.

Environmental demands and characteristics also led to other management decisions, such as the reorganization of the school calendar. In 2019, there were six different calendars

for the nine teaching units. According to the Director's report: “over time, due to nature and climate, we started to work with an adapted calendar in almost all schools. Because sometimes one stopped for reforms. Sometimes, due to a flood, it stopped in one and not in another” (our translation).

The operating regime of the Schools of Waters, according to its management team, also changes frequently, depending on the natural condition and student demand. In this sense, according to the Principal, schools can have “regular regime (with four hours of lessons), extended hours (with five hours of lessons) and full hours (with eight hours of lessons)” (our translation). In 2019, except for Santa Aurélia and São João, which operated on a regular basis, the other teaching units worked full-time.

At the end of 2019, the management team was also studying the possibility of adopting an alternation regime - school time and community time - in the Schools of Waters (*field diary registration*). The Principal's report provided some justification:

We are thinking of an alternation regime, precisely because of the climate in Corumbá, because of flood and drought, because we went through these two moments. It is very difficult, when the flood is too much, the boat does not arrive, and the riverside families leave the community to come to the city, because their houses are flooded. And sometimes the flood is very strong and it reach even the school, so we really have to stop the class. In the drought it is very dry, so we go through a lack of water, especially in the Taquari region. The Taquari River is drying and the water comes from a well, and when it is very dry the wells also tend to dry out. So, for this reality, we have this study: do a pilot experiment in at least two schools to see if we can carry out this alternation regime (our translation).

In view of the long distances between the places of residence and the teaching units of many students, there was provision of student accommodation on the premises of Nazaré, Jatobazinho, Paraguai Mirim, São Lourenço and Santa Mônica. In the first three, the boarding school took place during the week and in the last two, during the two-month period.

In 2019, three to four teachers worked in each teaching unit; in Paraguai Mirim and Jatobazinho this number was higher, with five and six teachers, respectively. In addition to teachers, schools had cooks, general service assistants, pilots and tractor drivers, and accommodation monitors. These professionals, hegemonically, lived in the urban perimeter of Corumbá, staying in the school premises during the school period, with scheduled visits to the city, usually in the interstices of the two month school term.

Curricular proposal and monitoring of pedagogical work

In 2019, there was a Political Pedagogical Project (PPP) of the Municipal Rural School of Integral Education Porto Esperança Center and Extensions, taken as a reference to guide actions in all teaching units. This document, dated from 2017, consists of the sections: Presentation; I. School Management; II. Pedagogical Coordination; III. Identification; IV. School History; V. Identification Data; SAW. From Vision to Objectives; VII. Organization and Operation of the Stages Offered; VIII. Curricular Organization; IX. Curriculum Considerations; X. Teaching Strategies for Basic Education; XI. School evaluation; XII. Physical space; XIII. Profile of the Faculty and Administrative Technicians; XIV. In-Service Formation; XV. Institutional Evaluation; XVI. Assistance to Students with Special Needs; XVII. School Regime; XVIII. Projects; XIX. School Actions; References; Attachments (CORUMBÁ, 2017). In sections III. Identification, IV. School History and V. PPP Identification Data, information about the five schools and their extensions is presented.

According to CP3, “*when we get together to do the Political Pedagogical Project, we seek to see the reality of each of the schools, to work on that reality. We seek to meet the specific needs of our riverside students*” (our translation). Due to the change in the operating regime of teaching units, the Principal signaled an update movement:

[...] because of the curricular matrix that is changing, because of a school that was regular and went to full education, a school that was regular and went to extended hours. So, for all these reasons, the Pedagogical Political Project is being reformulated (our translation).

Here we highlight aspects faced by management, in the organization of schools, in view of the constant movement of the natural conditions to which they are submitted. Both Early Childhood and Elementary Education of Schools of Waters predicted a workload of 1600 hours per year (CORUMBÁ, 2017). The contents in Early Childhood Education were organized according to the axes: “The Self, the Other and the We; Listening, speaking, thoughts and imagination; Spaces, times, quantities, relationships and transformations; Body, gestures and movements; Lines, sounds, colors and shapes; Modern Foreign Language; Elective Activities” (CORUMBÁ, 2017, p. 8, our translation). In turn, elementary school organized the curriculum on a common and diversified basis (CORUMBÁ, 2017; MELO, 2017), through the components: Art; Artistic and Cultural Activities; Sciences; Communication and Media; PE; Citizen Formation; Geography; Story; Sports Initiation; Modern Foreign Language (English); Portuguese language; Mathematics; Guidelines for Study, Research and Orality.

Zerlotti's research (2014, p. 116), developed in a teaching unit in Upper Pantanal, showed “that the students' knowledge was included in only a few specific activities and that they were not represented in the textbooks used” (our translation). Melo (2017, p. 121), in a study carried out in another teaching unit also in the Upper Pantanal, informed that “in the school curriculum there is no reference to the Pantanal culture, nor in the speeches of the teachers who participated in the study, so it is possible to affirm that the school culture of that school does not incorporate the Pantanal culture” (our translation).

In contrast, Rios (2020, p. 51), in a survey carried out in three Schools of Waters located in the Middle and Upper Pantanal of Corumbá, states that:

In these schools there is a concern with the curriculum that aims to bring students and teachers closer to the local context, with the rescue of culture in its most diverse manifestation, aiming at the possibility of the school presenting students with the Pantanal culture, its diversity beyond fauna and of flora (our translation).

The different perceptions of these investigations, at different times and in different locations, on the incorporation of the sociocultural elements of the riverside and Pantanal students in the school curriculum, may be related to the high turnover of teachers in the Schools of Waters (MELO, 2017) and also to the constant concern of management team with the continued training of teachers who work in these teaching units (RIOS, 2020).

CP1's narrative gives us some clues about the movements for the construction of a pedagogical proposal linked to the realities of the communities where the Schools of Waters are located:

We are still crawling on the ideal. We use active learning methodology, projects, group work, but they are still punctual. We have not yet managed to make the teaching team assume this as a commitment and a continuous methodology. If you see our portfolios, you will see several activities that fall within the active methodology, but they are a little specific. Some community issues are very sensitive. I can mention the example of a school in which we are part of the MPT [Public Ministry of Labor] program at the school, which is against child labor. So many activities, every two months, are applied within this awareness of the child and the awareness of the family (our translation).

At least two are the major management challenges in relation to teachers: the first refers to the fact that almost all have a temporary contract, which causes high change in the staff; the second, which permeated all pedagogical work, is the fact that teachers teach curricular components outside their initial formation. In addition to restraint of financial resources, the difficulty of selecting teachers willing to reside in teaching units during the school year seems

to be a constant barrier to the expansion and qualification of the teaching staff (*field diary registration*).

Added to this, the fact that seven of the nine teaching units in 2019 were organized with multigrade, expanding the demands of pedagogical work in the classroom. For Rios (2020, p. 116, our translation), “multigrade classes are a great challenge that is presented to teachers because, when planning, it is necessary to rethink the school, the subjects, the grades/years, content and assessments”.

Regarding school evaluation, the PPP suggested that it be “carried out in a continuous, systematic and integral way, throughout the teaching-learning process, observing the student's behavior in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains, through different techniques and instruments” (CORUMBÁ, 2017, p. 15, our translation).

Considering that the management team of the Schools of Waters (Principal and Pedagogical Coordinators) was concentrated in the urban headquarters of the municipality, the demands of pedagogical work were met through: a) contact by phone and internet, in the units that had these services; b) by periodic visits by members of the management to the teaching units; c) continued formation of teachers at the end of each term. The Principal informed us of another way of monitoring the activities at the Schools of Waters:

We manage from here, but in each school, we leave a teaching representative to attend. It is he who transfers what is happening, what is needed. So we have this teacher who supports us with this in each school, in each extension, it helps us a lot. For that, we also make a work scale. We don't leave a support teacher all year round. So, we pass the responsibility on to all the teachers who work at that school, for example I have three teachers, one month is one, another month is another. So, there's not just one! We say: “you are all responsible for the school, and we are responsible for all of you and for all schools!” (our translation).

Administratively, a distribution of activities was carried out among the three coordinators, each being primarily responsible for a set of three teaching units. According to CP2, “although there is this division, we work together. When one [coordinator] cannot go on a visit, the other one does. That's why we try to be aligned. We split but stay together!” (our translation).

With their own space in the urban administrative headquarters of the Schools of Waters, the pedagogical coordinators have an intense routine of activities: meetings with the management and with SEMED, assistance to families, analysis of proposals, pedagogical projects and materials, exchange of experiences on visits to teaching units, referrals of

specificities of teachers and students, organization of continuing formation, feeding of the educational management system, among others (*field diary registration*).

CP2 reported that, in order to immediately meet the pedagogical demands, “SEMED's intention is to allocate one pedagogical coordinator per school, to be closer to the teacher's work!” (our translation).

In addition to the Principal and the Pedagogical Coordinators, in 2019, at the administrative headquarters of the Schools of Waters, there was a Secretary, two Secretarial Assistants and a General Services professional. The Secretariat played an active role in enrollment, school records, control of transport and school meals, sending and receiving school documents and personal belongings of teachers and staff housed in teaching units, among others (*field diary registration*).

The management team, consensually, highlighted the participation of the family and the community in actions with the teaching units: “as a management, we are very happy because we have a huge participation of the community. It's meeting, family at school, bingo!” (Principal, our translation); “Participation is intense! Thus, an activity is proposed at school, because we have the family party, the June festival, they are very active. And regardless of party, celebrations, they are frequent parents” (CP2); “Every end of two months there are meetings with parents, because there is a way for teachers to be there and talk to parents. This is the only time they have to learn about their student-children” (CP3). CP1 also added that, “in some places where the community is closer to the school, we started to do participatory reading. So, the parents also read some history books from our library” (our translation).

Final considerations

The Schools of Waters have a unique condition among Brazilian schools, even among other riverside schools in other regions of the country, due to the social, cultural, economic and natural conditions that constitute them, in the Pantanal context. Despite the particularities and differences between municipal schools (in the urban area, in settlements and riverside), they all obey the specific management organization. Facing the general administrative organization, the management of the Water Schools tries to build pedagogical possibilities that make these establishments peculiar in their organization and functioning, since, due to their physiographic characteristics, they face situations that change all the time. In this context, management decisions are guided by pedagogical and political choices with a view to considering regional specificities, as the direction and pedagogical coordinators recognize the importance of working

with communities. In this daily life of decisions and diversities, the autonomy necessary to carry out the proposed work encounters strong obstacles with resource constraints, aggravated by great distances, by the insufficiency of objective material conditions for work closer to the local population and by the precariousness of the contracts of the teachers, which leads to the high change of these professionals. Thus, even with formation to act in their positions, the managers deal with strong limitations for the development of their work.

As Oliveira and Vasques-Menezes (2018) describe, in interlocution with Vasconcelos (2009), school management does not exercise “a purely bureaucratic-administrative role”, but it is “a task of articulation, coordination and intentionality, which, although it supposes the administrative aspects, it essentially links the principal to the school's pedagogical management” (p. 881). The choices of the management of the Schools of Waters show this pedagogical relationship in the care as they enable the materialization of educational policies of attention to diversity.

In undertaking these tasks, countless public and private institutions are involved: City Hall, the Public Ministry and non-governmental organizations, as reported by CPI on the mobilization for the eradication of child labor. In this sense, research that addresses these issues would be interesting, in order to elucidate how relations are configured at the interface of social policies, the existence of possible tensions, the potential for the pedagogical work developed and, above all, the contributions and support to the management of these schools.

Another aspect that deserves to be further explored concerns the organization of pedagogical work and the curriculum. The riverside and Pantanal populations, with their knowledge, cultures, forms of material production of existence, must be instituting the organization and development of pedagogical work in the Schools of Waters. In this perspective, the essential participation of the family and the community is constitutive of an education to be built *with* and *by* (and not only *for*) the subjects of the countryside. This, in our understanding, is a permanent challenge for the management of the education of peasant populations, of the waters, of the Pantanal, of the forests.

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