

## **School Management in K-12 Education: constructions and strategies in face of professional challenges**

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**ABSTRACT – School Management in K-12 Education: constructions and strategies in face of professional challenges.** This article results from a qualitative research aimed at understanding how the democratization processes in schools are established and identifying the confrontations arising from the demand for educational quality in K-12 education, notably in the attributions assigned to municipal school managers in the city of Rio de Janeiro. This questioning was anchored in the analysis of the profile, training and actions of two female school managers, as well as the challenges imposed on them by the new managerial and technological requirements, in view of the current complexity of the management positions of the K-12 school, which is subject to external evaluations in line with the demands of international or multilateral organizations.

**Keywords: School Management. K-12 Education. Professional Challenges.**

**RESUMO – Gestão Escolar na Educação Básica: construções e estratégias frente aos desafios profissionais.** Este artigo resulta de uma pesquisa qualitativa cujo objetivo foi compreender como se estabelecem os processos de democratização nas escolas e identificar os enfrentamentos decorrentes das cobranças pela qualidade educacional na educação básica, notadamente nas atribuições conferidas a gestores de escolas municipais da cidade do Rio de Janeiro. A problematização se ancorou na análise do perfil, da formação e das ações de duas gestoras escolares, bem como dos desafios impostos a elas pelos novos requerimentos gestoriais e tecnológicos, tendo em vista a complexidade atual dos cargos de direção da escola básica, submetida às avaliações externas, em consonância com as demandas dos organismos internacionais ou multilaterais.

**Palavras-chave: Gestão Escolar. Educação Básica. Desafios Profissionais.**

## Introduction

Presently, the association between education and quality has become a recurring discourse. If, on the one hand, the conceptions of education and quality are built in the macro policies, in a perspective aligned with international logic, on the other it is in the micro spaces of each school that the school management tries to articulate strategies to solve the constant challenges.

The methodology used in the research was the qualitative approach, and the chosen design gave voice to the school managers to understand the complexity of their work. By means of visits to the schools surveyed and semi-structured interviews that, after being transcribed, had some excerpts chosen and presented with the code-names of Manager 1 and Manager 2. This methodological choice is justified because “[...] a problem invites to conciliate approaches that are concerned with the complexity of the real, without losing touch with previous inputs” (Laville; Dionne 1999, p. 43).

In this way, considering the multiple possibilities of construction of managers’ profile in the current context, this research sought to know the various aspects concerning this universe. What is the academic and professional training trajectory of this professional who started to manage the school? What is their conception of education? How do they face the complexities of management?

To answer these questions, two school units of K-12 Education were chosen, each one belonging to a Regional Education Coordination (CRE), as well as the questionnaire filled in by the school principals, from the city of Rio de Janeiro, on occasion of the test *Prova Brasil 2015*. The research proposed an analysis of the actions and dilemmas of educational management, opposing two territorialities of the city of Rio de Janeiro, aiming to understand how the processes of democratization are established in schools and identify the confrontations arising from demands on the performance of the school management.

The problematization was, thus, anchored in the analysis of the profile, training, and actions of the school managers who were the subjects of the study, as well as the challenges imposed on them, in view of the new managerial and technological requirements and the current complexity of management positions at school, submitted to external evaluations, in line with the demands of international or multilateral organizations. To understand the singularities of these professionals, the approximations and contradictions of the profession were drawn in the face of the diversity of training, conceptions of education, dynamics of action, and ways of accessing the position.

To present a summary of the research findings, this text consists of four related parts. The first clarifies the conception that permeates Brazilian education presently. The second part presents the profile, the training and the actions of the school managers. The third one brings to light the analysis of the school management of the two public schools in

Rio de Janeiro. Finally, the last part makes some considerations on the subject analyzed.

## **Education and the Contemporary Context**

In the panorama of Brazilian education, the discourse of quality is evidenced as an effect of political conceptions that have repercussions on the performance of school managers. The 1988 Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988) marked the weakening of the nation-state, impacting social policies, as analyzed by Frigotto (2009) and Sander (2007). Educational policies started to be in line with the new management and technological requirements, and were subject to external evaluations, in accordance with the demands of international or multilateral organizations.

In this scenario, in an explicit commitment to the entrepreneurial model, “[...] the public managerial administration uses the control *a posteriori* of the results as a technical instrument that can make the organizations to learn with their mistakes and, from that, to prepare their future strategies” (Centro..., 1998, p. 11).

It is worth pointing out that the challenges to establish a Brazilian education with quality date back to the early legal documents of Colonial Brazil. In his analysis, Cunha (1991) emphasized that the Brazilian educational policy is marked by zigzag, a coming and going that is evident in the decisions of the political class. “In this sense, we have historically realized how education has gone, sometimes responding to social policies, sometimes meeting the needs of the economy, but little concerned with long-term planning” (Carvalho, 2006, p. 12).

Since the 1980s, the conception of education has been consolidated along the lines of international or multilateral organizations, and these changes have impacted the educational field. More recently, this conception can be observed in the policies

[...] implemented in the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) – crossed the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, although with the benefits of expanded focused and compensatory social policies. At the end of the government of Dilma Roussef, they were restored in their most austere character, with new cuts in the public budget, and have gained momentum in the current Temer government (Gawryszewski; Motta; Putzke, 2017, p. 730).

In an intense way, it can be observed the sad reality of a disinvestment in the social scope that impacts education, creating tensions that “are not restricted to economic-corporate issues, but ethical-political as well” (Gawryszewski, Motta; Putzke, 2017, p. 745).

The international agreements of which Brazil became a signatory established the expansion of the number of enrollments in K-12 education and also the gradual improvement in the quality of education. Thus, in view of the explicit policy of withdrawing funds allocated to

education, the Brazilian government seeks to achieve the goals agreed at the international level by adopting and implementing a managerial approach to manage education.

This perspective follows the logic of the capitalist market and, of course, of the private sector, resulting from the premise of a minimum State, which takes over the position of controller and appraiser. As part of the decentralization and regulation agenda, the State now demands from each public school accountability for its results, as measured by students' performance in systemic assessments.

Under this logic, the complexity of public school management positions in K-12 education intensifies, with managers being obliged to respond to the demands of new managerial and technological requirements. According to Souza (2017), this strongly impacts the daily life of schools:

With the search profile for market efficiency and immediate quantitative results, we have observed, in the teaching-learning pedagogical relations and in the administrative management practices, the intensification of intra- and inter-institutions competitiveness, dividing teachers and students into productive groups, efficient on the one hand, and unproductive and incompetent on the other. The dissemination of rankings based on results obtained by schools in the various large-scale evaluations promoted by MEC (Ministry of Education) in recent years can be understood as an expression of this 'new' institutional rationality, which is increasingly reinforced and valued externally (Souza, 2017, p. 44-45).

Under the aegis of this technical rationality, there is a contradiction in the work of the school manager, which has to balance between the whole frameworks of legal dictates that value participation and the democratic process in the reality of schools. In this context, a return to a management with an entrepreneurial bias, which legitimates the product to the detriment of the human, is perceptible. The manager's work is modified, and, in this way, the demands increase, especially in the managerial dimension, and "[...] the manager's technical profile is emphasized, and his performance is similar to that of a manager/bureaucrat with goals to be fulfilled, incorporating principles of the private sector, such as efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity" (Terto; Souza, 2012, p. 9).

Thus, on the teachers who take over school management, the expectation of the role of the manager defined in a managerial logic, present in the political, administrative, cultural, educational, and economic discourses, demands, in the daily lives of the schools, effective actions that align this conception. Obviously, these educational guidelines based on competence models are close to the Business Administration models.

## **K-12 Education Public School Manager in the City of Rio de Janeiro**

In order to understand who the public schools' managers in the city of Rio de Janeiro are, data from the *QEdu*<sup>1</sup> website was used, which contains the answers to the questionnaires completed by these professionals on the occasion of the test *Prova Brasil 2015*. In the city of Rio de Janeiro, 894 questionnaires were applied to municipal school principals who had students from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> grades, with 100% return of valid answers.

The first finding regarding the profile of school managers at this level of education is that most of the professionals, 90%, are females. This data also corresponds to the Brazilian reality as a whole, which detected a percentage of 80% of women in management positions in elementary schools.

Regarding the age group, 63% was aged between 40 and 54 years, 37% between 40 to 49 years and 26%, from 50 to 54 years. It should be noted that in the school management of the initial grades of K-12 education, the presence of "the female brings [...] the socio-cultural marks historically constructed: explicit care, as an essential characteristic of the feminine and extreme dedication' (Paschoalino, 2017, p. 129).

All the participants in the questionnaire claimed that they were teachers, with an experience between three and over twenty years in teaching, being, at that moment, occupying the position of school manager. These two aspects of the profile of K-12 education school managers mark very specific characteristics: the school manager, in most cases, is a female teacher and has teaching experience.

Concerning the level of schooling, the answers were: 40% concluded Higher Education studies in Pedagogy, 49% hold other teaching Higher Education degrees, 10% declared they hold Higher Education degrees in other areas and 1% had only completed High School (with a 'technological' degree in teaching).

In relation to the time since completion of training, the data showed that the majority had graduated over 8 years ago. Thus, 26% replied that they had graduated from 8 to 14 years ago, 22%, from 15 to 20 years ago, and 41% said they had completed the training over 20 years ago.

The importance of teacher training is a recurring topic in several instances and the offer to follow-up for these professionals becomes a focus because

[...] they realized that in Brazilian Education the standards are insufficient to meet the standards of quality education, financing and educational management of systems and schools, curricula and pedagogical proposals, and valuation, training and working conditions of education professionals. UNESCO offers technical support and expertise to address quality and equity issues in education (Quality..., 2011, online).

Training as understood in current levels cannot be restricted to initial training, so continuing education, which is so necessary, was also questioned. By requesting that the participant indicate the post-graduate course of the highest degree held, with the following result: Specialization of at least 360 hours, 52%; *stricto sensu*, 5% for MSc and 1% for PhD.

The second question on continuing education was related to the professional development training that has taken place during the past two years. 82% had undergone professional development over the past two years, whereas 18% had not. It is common for education departments to offer training, including for teachers interested in becoming managers, as did the Rio de Janeiro Department:

As the social organization structures are renewed – presently, largely due to technological innovations – the institutions need to update themselves to better follow the changes of their time. In keeping with this reality, the Rio de Janeiro’s Municipal Education Network has been promoting a series of actions, such as the creation of the Paulo Freire Teacher Training School and the implementation of the mentoring system for first-time teachers in the municipality. With regard to management itself and, more than that, to the role of the principal, 2011 represented a milestone. The Municipal Department of Education offered the 60-hour-long online course in Public Educational Management to all teachers interested in learning how to manage a teaching unit (Machado, 2014, online).

In 2011, the municipal government of Rio de Janeiro trained 3,988 teachers in the management course, but even though they were approved in the training, it advised: those who want to “[...] be a principal must have a few more attributes: instruction that includes school management – it can be a postgraduate degree or, more commonly, the graduation in Pedagogy itself – and the minimum of five years as class coordinator” (Machado, 2014, online).

The training of school managers continued in 2012, with the completion of the second module, with 120 hours, which trained 1,278 principals. In this module, the topic was related to the daily life of the school, involving the administrative, financial, and pedagogical dimensions. At that time, the requirements to authorize the creation of a slate to run for election as principals required steps to be taken. In the first one, the presentation of the action plan to be developed in the school had to be approved by a panel from the Regional Education Coordination (CRE) in which the school was inserted. It was only after the approval of the slate by CRE that the candidates for the principal position could start their campaign for the school community, responsible for the choice of their leaders (Machado, 2014).

The norms for the election, or rather for the public consultation for the choice of the school managers who would operate during the 2018-2020 triennial, were modified and the criteria demanded that the

candidate could be “[...] any teacher with more than five years of experience, or more than three years of gratified function” (Pimentel, 2018, online).

The 1,537 professionals chosen as school managers for the new triennial were inducted in January 2018 and had to participate in the “[...] training course in pedagogical and administrative management promoted by the 11 CREs of the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Network” (Pimentel, 2018, online).

The changes initiated in this triennial will reach schools, as the Municipal Department of Education of Rio de Janeiro proposes a partnership work:

[...] each elected team was summoned to coordinate a self-assessment process for their school to support the action plan, which should be submitted by April 17. From there, the principals will partner with two supervisors – a pedagogical and an administrative one – who will help them to make a continuous management diagnosis, noting both the strengths, that are working, and those aspects that need to be corrected. Secretary of Education César Benjamin guarantees that this does not mean that, from now on, schools will be controlled, since the team of supervisors, like that of literacy teachers, was created by teachers’ commitment. The main goal is to provide support tools that can facilitate and improve the work of school managers aiming to improve the quality of teaching. He points out that the binomials ‘autonomy and responsibility’ (for schools) and ‘support and supervision’ (for the central level staff) are the current mottos that guide SME’s work (Pimentel, 2018, online).

With the intention of continuing the training of school managers in the city of Rio de Janeiro, this new modality, already in the process of construction since January 2018, proposes to rethink the collective. It is worth noting that some managers were already in the school management before the public consultation of this triennial and they remained in the position. This situation was also verified by the response to the questionnaire applied on the occasion of the test *Prova Brasil 2011*, when 63% of the participants declared that they had been the head of the same school for over three years.

The importance of training raised the problem related to the conflicts in work schedules of school managers and the lack of time to dedicate to training. Thus, when asked if they would like to have participated in continuing education activities and did not attend due to the conflict with working hours, 74% of managers replied positively, that work was an obstacle to reconcile with continual education. Though 18% of the respondents said it was not the work that made continuous training difficult and 8% of the participants said that they would not like to have continued training. This position is confirmed by the answer to the question that asked what the weekly workload of a principal was, when 58% responded that they exceeded the 40 hour work week.

The understanding of this reality and the acceptance by the managers themselves that they exceeded the working hours were part of a conception that emphasized the importance of management guided by follow-up, managing, and care (Paschoalino, 2017).

Another aspect that allowed for reflection was the way of ascending to the position, since 62% of the managers marked the option *Selective Process and Election*. These data allowed the understanding that the Rio de Janeiro's Municipal Education Network has an administrative profile outlined in advance by the Municipal Education Department, with specific criteria for access to the position, with emphasis on training. It is important to point out that many teachers who had already acted as managers of schools for years also adapted to this profile. In this sense, it is verified that the municipal managers follow the legal norms and requirements made by CRE, which establish a constant training process to correspond to the prerogatives of the position.

The guidelines received by the institution supporting the school were criticized by the State Union of Education Professionals of Rio de Janeiro (SEPE-RJ), which warned teachers about the importance of the choice of new school leaders for the 2018/2020 triennial:

Cases of moral harassment perpetrated by school departments are constantly increasing; this shows the pressure exerted by SME and CREs for results in a scenario of growing precariousness. This electoral process should be seen as a further opportunity to build resistance and critical participation of school communities within the school, it is time for candidates from the staff, supported by everyone at school who work, study, and entrust their children to the school (Eleição..., 2017, online).

In keeping with this trend, SEPE raises some questions that should be present in the discussions, such as the need to rethink the relationships within the school, which, given their specificities, needs to respond to the various educational demands. The issue raised by SEPE refers to the democratization of schools, provided for in the legal documents, notably the Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988) and the National Educational Bases and Guidelines Law – LDB – (Brasil, 1996). The SEPE document guides the management plan to be drawn up with the participation of the entire school community. From this perspective, it reinforced the idea of the collective construction of a Political Pedagogical Project that meets common goals:

One question that we all should ask is 'The position as a principal is a position of trust: whose trust?' This question is important because, for SME, the school principal is someone whose obligation is to apply their meritocratic policy and deliver the results of the evaluations within what is expected, without questions. We understand that the SME management model is based on projects prepared by companies and paid for by the municipality, and this format is the ideal for the government of Rio

de Janeiro to transfer public money to companies. The elected principals must fight to ensure the autonomy of the school workers in face of these meritocratic processes that are the germ of the potential complete outsourcing of schools (Election ..., 2017, online).

The SEPE question brings to light a reality already known, that is, the duplicity of the position of managers, who have to address the singularities of the institution in which they work, but also receive guidance and requirements from the municipal government. In this sense,

[...] the principal is assumed, on the one hand, as the 'face' of the school, while on the other, as the representative – 'the face' – of the Ministry of Education. Thus, we warn for the dual role that the principal plays, that is, as a representative of the management in the school and as a spokesman for his colleagues and the school community represented by him/her (Silva; Ferreira, 2011, p. 4-5).

The authors, in claiming the dual role of school managers, made it possible to understand that, when the professionals in the school directive position change, these aspects must be reflected. At the time of the direct election process for the municipal public schools in October 2017, SEPE made the following statement: "The SME will continue to try to regain the vertical control it already has in the schools of the network, and organization will be very important to face possible illegal persecution and discharges that may happen" (Eleição..., 2017, online).

It is important to emphasize that the educational process is political, therefore stressed at all times. Different views and also distinct interests permeate school relations, and conflicts often arise. But it is no use taking the naive perspective of trying to eliminate them; on the contrary, the recognition that they exist and need to be made explicit and discussed enables the construction of collective strategies capable of changing this reality.

### **The Challenges of the Managers in their Daily Work-life**

To try to understand the performance of managers in face of the current daily demands, two traditional schools of Rio de Janeiro's Education Network from two different CREs were chosen. The first school is located in a district in the North Region of the city of Rio de Janeiro and it is a centennial institution, reopened in 1964. This institution operates in two shifts, morning and afternoon, serving 261 students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and 54 students from 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, totaling 315 students<sup>2</sup>. The institution's principal (Manager 1) has a licensure in Pedagogy, choosing to major in Educational Guidance and School Management. This choice was due to the possibility of working with a colleague who was planning to open a private school (a project that did not work out). She says, however, that studying School Management made all the difference in her professional life.

Manager 1 reported that she had been in the school for 17 years and that she knew each one of the students, as well as their families. Smiling, she explained that the school was serving to the second generation, as now the children of the students who were in school when she arrived were studying there. The principal talked about how difficult it was to start her work at the school:

Our school went through an intervention. Since I had majored in School Management and I was here for a couple of years, and the staff was afraid that people would come from outside, because that was what had happened before. The principals had been here a long time, and they did not decide on a slate, and an outsider was nominated by the municipal government. It was then that things became ugly, she stayed 2 or 3 years, there were serious complaints, followed by an intervention. Then, in the middle of all of this, some people wanted someone from the school. It was not unanimous, we needed 50% + 1 and it was exactly how we won the election. At first, it was very difficult. My former associate is from the reading room because when she was completing 11 years of management, her parents became very sick and she asked to leave. Then another teacher came, and she was also from the reading room, Verinha, who was almost in the process of retirement and, after five years, she also left because of her husband's health issues. And then we called Ana, who came in brand new [...] (Manager 1, 2017).

Manager 1 told how, although there was only one slate, she secured a close victory, and the relationship with her fellow teachers was initially marked by distinct feelings. School management involves a whole range of feelings, choices, decisions and, above all, actions, in a tangle of interactions. In this sense, Lück (2009) elucidated the need for school management to constantly adapt, attentive to the context to make the necessary adjustments in management. However, management relations extrapolate the school and the relationship with CRE was also not easy, as reported by the principal:

In the beginning, the CRE would literally camp here. I had visits almost every day. In the beginning, I had stomach aches, I bit all my nails, desperate. Had another training course by the stick and then I thought: "Am I not doing everything right? Am I not doing the right thing? So there's no reason to be that way!" And I started to not care if inspectors came or didn't come. But that was an individual process because some colleagues come here with the same mindset as mine and some come making demands: "Did you do this?" That impacts you; you become afraid, upset, especially when you are starting out. I think the beginning is very hard for a lot of people (Manager 1, 2017).

The attitude of believing in what she articulated and did, was gradually building her work plan, which focused on the collective work and commitment of all. Given this position, the recognition of Manager 1's work allowed her to perceive characteristics that translated into: "[...] a condition of success to the practice of the school work" (Lück, 2009, p. 34). Thus, the interviewed manager said that her constant presence at work and her dedication made the difference in her management:

I had some enemies in relation to keeping myself firm and saying 'no, you are going to keep this schedule!' If I keep mine, why can't people keep their own? And then there is that, I can't come in hang my coat on the chair and go shopping. If I decided to get things into gear, I have to be working. If we don't work, it doesn't go. Then a bunch of people left, even teachers asked to leave. In the beginning, it felt like drying ice, sometimes I felt like: 'I think I'll quit!' (Manager 1, 2017).

Manager 1's gradual conquest of calling everyone to an effective participation also created bonds of respect and appreciation for work: "I think one of the nicer things happened in my second term. A janitor who had been here 30 years turned to me and said, 'Can I tell you something? You changed the face of the school!'" (Manager 1, 2017).

When she heard this comment, the principal, after going through rough patches and at times feeling alone, realized that the employee's observations did not refer to the physical *face* of the school, but rather to changes in relationships with people, because

[...] in personal interaction the understanding, the emotions, and above all the responses to mutual survival demands are stimulated through the body, where simple acts such as a word, a look, a touch, a smile, the clothing, the verticality. Simple acts that stimulate the senses, the emotion, and the rationality and that place the person in a network of meaningful relationships that lead her to transcend and to have a fundamental human experiential dignity (Simões; Rodrigues; Salgueiro, 2011, p. 222).

In these interactions guided by respect, as well as by constant follow-up, the manager was gradually winning over the school community and promoting the dignity of all. Thus, the work accomplished gained distinct airs and also supported the teachers, resulting in a collective commitment.

The quality of the work carried out also had repercussions on the school's Index of Development of Basic Education (IDEB), which has exceeded the goals set since 2007; in 2015 it achieved grade 7.0 of the IDEB, when the intended target was 6.2.

Manager 1 stated that the seemingly comfortable situation of maintaining IDEB above the expected target did not slow them down; on the contrary, together with her work team, she always sought to create differentiated situations of collective participation and learning. In this sense, the school keeps an updated page on Facebook, in which the various activities of the institution are presented.

Manager 1 reported that there were many management challenges and that managing people, materials, and infrastructure was not an easy task. With this understanding, in addition to the initial training, she also valued the in-service training, always seeking to provide her teachers with collective moments to rethink the school and to build together the Political Pedagogical Project (PPP).

The second surveyed school is located in the South Region of the city of Rio de Janeiro and is also very old, it was created in 1942. It serves 39 Early Childhood Education children and 254 students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>

grade, totaling 293 students, according to the 2017 School Census<sup>3</sup>. It also works in the morning and in the afternoon. In the interview, the principal said that she attended high school with a technical degree in teaching, then Pedagogy and also specialized in School Management. She says that she began her professional life as a teacher in 2003 in a private school, joining the municipal public network in 2007. She revealed that at first, she did not think of being a school principal. She told that she worked in a large school and saw the number of demands that management had. At the same time, as a teacher, she felt abandoned, without the necessary support. She emphasized: "I truly believe in teamwork and this aspect was not experienced there" (Manager 2, 2018).

Manager 2 said that she did not even know of the existence of the school where she currently works as a manager, even though she lived close to it. It is worth mentioning that the school is a little hidden because it is located in a narrow street, without much traffic. Only in 2016, when she asked to transfer from the school where she was working, she learned of the existence of this school and became interested in working there. When she arrived she had a good impression, as evidenced by the interview excerpt below:

When I got to school I became acquainted with what I believed to be school work. I stayed a year as a teacher and then, in 2017, the principal invited me to stay in as Teaching Coordinator and, little by little, she saw my profile and said that I had a knack for management and also many people had no interest in assuming the directorship. So she said she was about to retire and would support my candidacy. At first, I was undecided because I was new here, but I accepted the challenge (Manager 2, 2018).

The manager said that she did not have a competing slate, which prevented the common wear and tear of any election process with more than one candidate. This way, the newly-elected reported the many challenges she faced in the daily life of the school.

Manager 2's relationships with the school community were still consolidating and she was aware that it would take time for her work to be better evaluated. By understanding that:

The major objective of the educational community is thus to establish an effective teaching community, where it perseveres, collectively, not only the ideal of teaching according to the knowledge socially produced, but also of learning, in agreement with the principles of continuous renewal of knowledge, creating an environment of continuous development for students, teachers, employees and, of course, managers (Lück, 2009, p. 16).

Thus, among some of the challenges posed by the position, she highlighted the interpersonal relations and said that she finds it difficult to make demands and/or warn her fellow education professionals, although she emphasized that she understood these were attributions inherent to the position. According to her,

[...] leadership has changed this year. So I think that because there is a change, things are still settling. When a new teacher arrives in the classroom, the students test the teacher as far as they can go... I think we are experiencing this testing moment. It seems like it's not real, but the teachers test the principals too, you know? I think we are living in this moment of adjusting to our role, which is not easy because the people that are in management are not the same age, we are young. There are many teachers who have a lot more experience than us in management, but we adjust, it is natural in this moment of change. The previous principal was older, and she had been in the position for many years. People are receiving us well, they are respecting, and I think it is a normal process (Manager 2, 2018).

Initially, changes cause insecurity, since the culture of the institution is already consolidated and the new “[...] creates within the school fields of dispute between the managers and the teachers or between groups of teachers, or with the employees and the students, demanding negotiations and renegotiations, so that the limits of control are always changing” (Ferretti, 2011, p. 35).

Manager 2, aware of the existence of expectations in relation to her work, emphasized that her management prioritized that the interpersonal relations in the school were dealt with utmost care, due to her little time in action. She stated that the group of teachers was cohesive, engaged, and committed, however, in face of some teachers' failure, she still felt insecure dealing with the situation:

I find it difficult to call someone in my office to warn or make demands, it's hard for me. I've been trying to find ways to... Because there is this personal relationship too... so... we're afraid of mixing things. I might be drawing the person's attention to a professional area of improvement and the person might take it personally. For me, this is difficult. Thank God, everything was well understood, when I had to call someone out on something they didn't take it personally (Manager 2, 2018).

Also in the field of interpersonal relationships, contact with the students' families was also a challenge because parents did not have the habit of seeking school out on a regular basis, only when they were called in or when something different happened with their children. Relations with CRE were also in the process of being adjusted, mainly bureaucratic aspects. The principal commented that there were requests almost on a daily basis and all had short deadlines. Another difficult aspect pointed out by the principal was the finances of the school, because, faced with the small amount allocated to the school, the management could not meet the many demands, especially those relating to the physical aspect of the school:

[...] the budget was not much and there was a lot to do. We try to make ends meet. There are two funds, federal and municipal. The federal money is more for school supplies. We receive a school kit for the students, with individual materials for each one, the kit from the city. But we receive a federal budget to supplement it, we buy stationery and even material for their personal use. And there is the municipal budget, which

is an amount that comes twice a year, for maintenance of equipment and furniture (Manager 2, 2018).

Problems concerning the school funds could be observed during the visit, when one could easily see the deterioration of some spaces that, although well cared for and decorated by the school, had broken glass in the windows and moldy painting. The management of the school also had a problem with the cleaning staff sent by the municipal government through outsourced contracts:

Unfortunately, the municipal government had a problem with this company. Overall, since January, this has been a challenge for me, to be able to manage, because... How to have the school clean and acceptable for the students without having a cleaning staff? Because they were not paying the salaries, they cut two employees at the same time and we were left with nobody, they only sent one substitute, so... It's only two people for the whole school, that's not enough (Manager 2, 2018).

The spaces already worn down by time and poor maintenance by lack of personnel made the school lose much of its splendor, even though they were adorned with the bright colors of the works of the students. The school principal even organized a group for cleaning and painting the school on a Saturday in April and said she still counted on community participation in fundraising with garage sales and raffles.

Another challenge that was put to the manager of the school was to improve the IDEB. It is worth mentioning that, since 2007, the results for this index were exceeding the projected targets, reaching 6.2 in 2011 and 6.5 in 2013, but in 2015 the school reached 5.5 for a goal of 5.6. Despite the small difference from the expected target, the result became a concern due to the school's declining performance.

The manager revealed that the previous manager established several partnerships with the community and the surrounding universities, which greatly enriched the work done by the school, as well as gave it greater visibility. The current manager said that she intends to continue these partnerships, doing work directed to the students, but also thinking about doing something that includes the families. An example is the organization of the Literary Tea during the meetings, with the aim of improving the participation of families. Other ideas were already part of the new manager's plans:

Maybe this year we can have a sit down with the parents. In addition to reporting moments, offering lectures on education-related issues, such as the family-school relationship. I think that if we could do this, it would be a two-way exchange. It's demanding, there's no way... There's a Psychology teacher from UFRJ [Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro] who might be able to help us accomplish this work; let's see (Manager 2, 2018).

At first, a management position requires a lot of persistence to meet the various demands. Manager 2 said that she was always open for dialogue at school and that she had set up a WhatsApp group with the teachers. She added laughing: "So, I also work a lot out of school, every hour there's a message" (Manager 2, 2018).

Working overtime is already a management task since the one who takes over this position must spend all their time leading processes and relationships. Nowadays, with the ease of access to various communication technologies, being available full time has become a reality.

The complexity of the school managers' work and the many demands in relation to the school performance were clear in the analysis carried out. The two schools surveyed, although located in different regions, symbolized a tradition that evoked a level of quality that surpassed the base benchmarks required by the systemic evaluations. The values instilled by each manager allowed the creation of cohesive teams, which were guided by values and collective action plans. The difficulties of starting in a leadership position without support were reported by the two interviewees, who experienced the professional trajectory at different times of their lives.

In this sense, there are several difficulties in the training of this professional who manages a school. The initial training courses for school managers do not enable them to deal with all the demands arising from the complexity of the position nowadays (Souza, 2012; Paschoalino, 2017).

In addition to initial training, in-service and through service training is required; continuous training needs to be part of the school management routine. This perspective was discussed by the authors Burgos and Canegal (2011) in an ethnographic research carried out in four K-12 education public schools, in which they evidenced the need for:

[...] a strong investment in the technical qualification of the principals, it will be necessary to politically construct a new consensus on the role of the school, incorporating to the notion of school accomplishment, not only the students' proficiency in specific subjects, but also its effect in the diffusion of values compatible with the democratic republic designed in 1988. And for this school to exist, the principal will need to have the bases of her authority reconstructed, allying management competence and institutional conditions compatible with the exercise of a true political and pedagogical leadership of the school (Burgos, Canegal, 2011, p. 35).

This lack of training of school managers is a reality in Brazil, but other countries, attentive to this current issue, have sought ways to offer continued education to these professionals. In Portugal, for example, instances were created to provide group meetings of school managers at different levels. In these meetings, which occur in the sector, regional, and national spheres, continuous training is offered through the exchange of experiences. Another initiative was the constitution of two associations of school leaders to support the school principals in their actions, either pedagogical, administrative, financial, or legal. The collective discussion, reflection, and analysis of new situations made the in-service training of the principals' group possible and enhanced their performance in schools (Paschoalino et al., 2016).

Chile is another country that has been investing in the training of school managers in order to prepare good principals. Since 2011, the

Chilean Ministry of Education has implemented a Training Plan for Principals that aims to train principals or aspiring principals to develop knowledge and skills and guide practices that aim at improving the school (Llorente; Lazcano; Volante, 2018).

The schools' issues are based on the logic of international organizations and, in this way, their managers, in addition to their multiple and complex tasks are often blamed for not being able to improve the institution's IDEB. The criteria based on grades no longer consider the uniqueness of schools and the efforts of their professionals.

### **Final Remarks**

Since the 1990s, the changes in education, mainly with the implementation of systemic tests, have changed the look at the schools and, consequently, at their managers. The huge variety of training of these teaching professionals who take over the school management brings in its core the multiplicity of conceptions of leadership and action.

With similar emphasis, the forms of insertion to the position, the permanence and the autonomy of the school managers differ within the educational system of Brazilian education. Thus, only one dimension becomes common to all Brazil: the responsibility of this professional in the process of guaranteeing the satisfactory performance of schools in external evaluations. According to this logic, the singularities and specificities of each institution are diluted in rankings.

By understanding that in each school, when a manager takes charge, interpersonal relationships need to be observed and improved for the creation of a good work team, the continuous training of this professional becomes essential, as they are the ones who face daily a range of issues and problems. By approaching each school and giving voice to its managers, the study made it possible to understand how difficult the beginning of management work is without the necessary support. In this sense, in order to face contemporary challenges, school management cannot be based only on initial training, requiring training that glimpses other realities and allows for collectively constructed analyses.

The municipal government of Rio de Janeiro, in creating strategies to follow-up school management, offers the advice of two supervisors, a pedagogical and a management one, who have the function of supporting school management in the diagnosis of the school for possible action. This way, the generated discourse brings the perspective that this new follow-up dynamics from the supervisors makes it easier to maximize directive action, with the identification of strengths and the correction of weaknesses. This proposal is new and only a few steps have been taken so far to meet the diverse demands of the school manager. Thus, it will be necessary to follow the work initiated by the municipal government of Rio de Janeiro to evaluate if it will fulfill its goal of strengthening the training of school managers.

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## Notes

- 1 Available at: <<https://www.qedu.org.br/>>. Accessed: 20 December 2017.
- 2 School Census Data 2017. Available at: <<https://www.melhorescola.net/escola/0209001-escola-municipal-benedito-ottoni>>. Accessed: 22 January 2018.
- 3 School Census Data 2017. Available at: <<https://www.melhorescola.net/escola/0204010-escola-municipal-francisco-alves>>. Accessed: 25 January 2018.

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