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# THE PERFORMANCE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN GUARANTEEING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

A ATUAÇÃO DA GESTÃO ESCOLAR NA GARANTIA DO DIREITO À EDUCAÇÃO

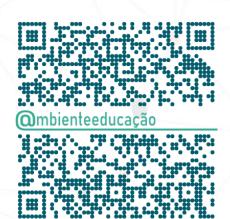
LA ACTUACIÓN DE LA GESTIÓN ESCOLAR EM LA GARANTÍA DEL DERECHO A LA EDUCACIÓN



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ABSTRACT: This article aims to present and reflect on the actions taken by school management, especially in elementary schools, to mitigate the harmful effects of the pandemic in relation to the expansion of educational inequalities and learning difficulties. Through Reports prepared by Pedagogy students from two classes of Supervised Internship in School Management, one at night with 17 students and another in the daytime with 20 students, it was intended to understand the actions implemented in the organization of school pedagogical work and the potential to have a positive impact on minimizing the distortions generated by the pandemic process. The observations made explicit in the reports indicate, among other findings, that difficulty for students in accessing and staying were the main problems faced by school management when returning to face-to-face activities in schools. In addition, curriculum reorganization and democratic management were redefined to better respond to the challenges at the beginning of the school year. Reports of increased violence at school are common, especially among students, and of impaired mental health, including that of school professionals. Finally, the internship experience allowed the Pedagogy classes to gain the perception that guaranteeing the right to education goes far beyond the formal aspects of entering and remaining in the school environment.

**KEYWORDS:** Right to education. School management. Pandemic. Supervised internship. Pedagogy.

RESUMO: Este artigo discute ações adotadas pela gestão escolar em escolas de ensino fundamental, para mitigar os efeitos nefastos da pandemia em relação à ampliação das desigualdades educacionais e dificuldades de aprendizagem. Por meio de Relatórios elaborados por estudantes de Pedagogia de duas turmas de Estágio Supervisionado em Gestão Escolar, buscou-se compreender a organização do trabalho pedagógico escolar e seu potencial de incidir positivamente para minimizar distorções geradas no contexto pandêmico. As observações explicitadas nos Relatórios indicam, dentre outros achados, dificuldades da gestão escolar para efetivar o acesso e permanência dos estudantes, no retorno às atividades presenciais nas escolas. Os Relatórios apontam, ainda, aumento de violência nas escolas, principalmente entre os estudantes, e de comprometimento da saúde mental dos profissionais da escola. Por fim, a experiência do estágio para as turmas de Pedagogia, permitiu a construção de percepções sobre a garantia do direito à educação, medida que vai muito além dos aspectos formais de ingresso e permanência no ambiente escolar.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Direito à educação. Gestão escolar. Pandemia. Estágio supervisionado. Pedagogia.





RESUMEN: Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar y reflexionar sobre las acciones realizadas por la gestión escolar, especialmente en las escuelas primarias, para mitigar los efectos nocivos de la pandemia en relación con la expansión de las desigualdades educativas y las dificultades de aprendizaje. A través de Informes elaborados por estudiantes de Pedagogía de dos promociones de Práctica Supervisada en Gestión Escolar, una nocturna con 17 alumnos y otra diurna con 20 alumnos, se pretendió comprender las acciones implementadas en la organización del trabajo pedagógico escolar y el potencial de tener un impacto positivo para minimizar las distorsiones generadas por el proceso de pandemia. Las observaciones explicitadas en los Informes indican, entre otros hallazgos, que la dificultad de acceso y permanencia de los estudiantes fueron los principales problemas que enfrentó la gestión escolar al regresar a las actividades presenciales en las escuelas. Además, se redefinió la reorganización curricular y la gestión democrática para responder mejor a los desafios del inicio del año escolar. Los informes de aumento de la violencia en la escuela son comunes, especialmente entre los estudiantes, y de deterioro de la salud mental, incluida la de los profesionales de la escuela. Por fin, la experiencia de pasantía permitió a las clases de Pedagogía ganar la percepción de que garantizar el derecho a la educación va mucho más allá de los aspectos formales de ingreso y permanencia en el ámbito escolar.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Derecho a la educación. Gestión escolar. Pandemia. Prácticas supervisadas. Pedagogía.

### Introduction

The long and winding trajectory of the legal consecration of the right to education in Brazil is abundant in advances and setbacks. Figueiredo and Junior Lins (2018), assert that although the right to education has been strongly defended as necessary since 1933 by the renowned jurist Pontes de Miranda, it is only in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Brasil, 1988), which reinaugurated the Democratic State of Law, that education is embraced by social rights (Art. 6, FC/88) and declared a right of all and a duty of the State and the family (Art. 205, FC/88). It should be "promoted and fostered with the cooperation of society, with a view to the full development of the person, his preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his qualification for work" (Art. 205, FC/88, our translation).

This clumsy path is echoed in Bobbio's (2004) assertion that human rights are, above all, historical and, as such, gradually arise from the struggles waged for the emancipation of humanity, from the transformations of the living conditions of the whole society. Historical rights, underline the author, "are born in certain circumstances, characterized by struggles in defense of new freedoms against old powers, and born gradually, not all at once and not once and for all" (Bobbio, 2004, p. 9, our translation).





In Brazil, the constitutional guarantee of the right to education was built with intense and heated disputes between different actors, institutions, and political parties, both in the National Congress and in civil society. Moraes (2018), in his doctoral thesis, presents and analyzes the different conflicting interests in the educational field during the constituent assembly and the polysemy that involved the right to education in the face of different groups and social movements, manifested mainly in the commissions and subcommittees of the National Constituent Assembly. Many of these disputes persist to this day.

Although the 1988 Federal Constitution was successful in highlighting the right to education as one of the social rights, imposing duties on public agents and creating legal instruments for its realization, there is a consensus that much needs to be done to materialize the right to education. Despite the fact that it is possible to recognize important advances in its expansion. Machado and Ganzeli (2018, p. 61), in a study that analyzed the fulfillment of the right to education based on information from the 2016 School Census, concluded that, in addition to the urgency to fully realize the right to education, it is necessary that "investments are made in the implementation of differentiated policies to overcome the inequalities historically generated in the care of the various population segments in the country".

The COVID-19 pandemic, which had its most acute contagious phase in 2020 and 2021, contributed to deepening the setbacks in the realization of the right to education. During this period, social distancing became mandatory as a way to contain the uncontrolled expansion of contamination. Schools had to suspend face-to-face classes and adopt remote teaching as a possible alternative for the continuity of pedagogical work.

The scenario, extremely sudden and troubled, has greatly affected students, their families and education workers. Many researchers have focused on investigating and understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of school education, which has triggered a series of studies and research on socio-educational contexts and their possible consequences. Pimenta and Sousa (2021, p. 08), when mapping studies and articles produced on the subject, exposed reports of difficulties in relation to various aspects such as "learning; access to materials and technological tools by students and teachers; teaching methodologies in the context of the pandemic; educational inequalities; dropout and abandonment", among others. Another evidence of these studies was the finding of the deepening of the already existing and historical social inequality that is reflected in educational inequalities (Rodrigues, 2022).

The expansion of vaccination that began in January 2021 in Brazil decreased the spread of the virus, slowed its potential for contamination, and mitigated the lethality of the contingent





of contaminated people. Thus, in early 2022, it was possible to revive face-to-face activities in schools in an unrestricted manner. It is worth mentioning that pedagogical activities, with mishaps and inconstancies, were developed during the years of social distancing, so it is incorrect to say that in 2022, classes were resumed because they were already being carried out only remotely.

Based on the reading of reports prepared by Pedagogy students from two classes of Supervised Internship in School Management, one at night with 17 students and the other during the day with 20 students, the objective of this article is to understand and reflect on the actions adopted by school management to guarantee the right to education and minimize the consequences generated by the suspension of face-to-face pedagogical activities, especially in relation to the expansion of educational inequalities and learning difficulties.

## Right to education and school management in the Internship Reports

Subsequently, I will describe and analyze excerpts from the 37 reports of two Pedagogy classes, one from the night and one from the daytime, of the discipline of Supervised Internship in School Management. To ensure anonymity, the excerpts are referenced at the end of the citations with the letter 'S', which means student; the number, which expresses each of the randomly enumerated reports; and the lowercase letter 'd' or 'n', which refers to the period attended by the student, day or night. The methodology used to organize the excerpts from the Reports was inspired by Bardin (2016, p. 125), who suggests three moments for content analysis: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results, inference, and interpretation. The reports express various actions taken by the school management to promote and guarantee the right to education upon return to face-to-face school activities and also many adversities faced.

In this sense, there are setbacks observed in relation to what Cury (2007, p. 489) called "consequences" of the right to education, access and permanence in school, guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of 1988 and regulated by LDB 9394/1996 (Brasil, 1996), historical challenges of the national educational system that research indicated had already been overcome. Analyzing this theme, Oliveira (2007, p. 666) examines data from government agencies and demonstrates how "opportunities for access and permanence in the school system have expanded significantly for broad sections of the population" in recent years, projecting a scenario of universalization of elementary education at the end of the 20th century. As an





alternative, many schools have adhered to the methodology of the Unicef and Undime campaign of "Busca Ativa Escolar"<sup>2</sup>, a strategy to identify absentees and act for the inclusion of children and/or young people in school.

Another issue observed with the right to education in mind was the number of absences, vacancies, and dropouts. After returning to the classroom, the school has been faced with a small number of children. In the class I followed for a month, for example, the average attendance was half the class. In other classrooms and groupings, it was not uncommon for the same to happen. Illnesses, changes in the city, and changes in routine are some of the hypotheses that professionals are making in order to justify the high number of absences. As instructed by the prefecture, teachers fill in the children's attendance, and after a number of absences, they should contact the guardians. S11n

In my experience, it has been seen that there is an attempt to guarantee the right to education through actions such as calling the child's guardians when the child is absent and asking for justification. S3d

The school always tries to be open to dialog with families, welcoming and helping them in any way possible, including social assistance. When they identify cases of dropout or recurrent absences, the school is attentive and goes after the families seeking to provide conditions according to the specificities of the student, offering support in relation to permanence and pedagogical area, beyond the normal class shift. S17n

Still on the initiatives to ensure permanence in school, an indispensable requirement to guarantee the right to education, the following excerpt highlights a peculiar situation in a Youth and Adult Education school that required action by the school management.

In one specific case, an EJA (Education for Youth and Adults) student who became a mother and therefore ended up missing many classes, consulted the school to find out if she could attend classes with her child. Some teachers pointed out that this could be a problem, as the school did not have the structure to accommodate a child of that age. The teachers would not be responsible for her, and classmates might not like the presence of the child. Once again, the management was concerned about the right to access education, especially in this situation where a woman, just for being a mother, could, depending on the decision, be deprived of her right to access school. The deputy principal made a point of recalling that there was no point in the collective preaching for a not sexist education if, in this case, it allowed the student to be prevented from attending school just because she was a mother. S13n

The report highlights Santos' (2020) assertion that the pandemic has made situations of injustice and exclusion more visible and that some socially vulnerable groups have been the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> About the "Busca Ativa Escolar". Available at: https://buscaativaescolar.org.br/. Accessed on: 20 July 2023.





most affected by discrimination, being subject to reinforcement in the process of exclusion already experienced. In this sense, there was a need for school management action to minimize the difficulties presented by students, especially in Education for Youth and Adults. It should be remembered that, in this specific case, the offer in Brazil, in general, is in the night period, which prevents mothers from leaving their children in educational institutions during the day and attending schools during the same period.

The experience of the internship allowed the perception that guaranteeing the right to education goes far beyond the formal aspects of entry and permanence in the school environment, although these dimensions are preconditions for school education, efforts must be made for a reception that considers the different human dimensions of children and young people and the diversity of pedagogical and educational aspects that deserve attention from the management team.

Dealing with the right to Education goes far beyond guaranteeing the right to enrollment or the right to occupy school space. This became very clear during my internship. Guaranteeing children's right to Education also means incorporating policies and actions in the most diverse areas of daily school life, whether it is worrying about the choice of cutlery, or planning classroom activities that address topics that are meaningful to students. S8d

The right to Education permeates several other dimensions, which do not end in just providing a vacancy within the space, but there must be a guarantee of permanence, so that well-being and individualities are respected. And it is through school organization, good management and based on the documents that the school proposes to follow, to guarantee the rights of children who also compete for the right to Education. S7d

The curriculum reorganization is also reported as an initiative of the school management to mitigate the mismatch generated by the two years of social distancing and, consequently, the suspension of face-to-face classes.

Even though remote education was made available to students to continue their pedagogical activities, studies have shown that the initiative deepened the already existing educational inequality and favored groups with better social and financial conditions. It made those historically weakened in guaranteeing their right to education even more vulnerable (Santos, 2020; Vasco, 2020;). Rodrigues (2022, p. 10) points out that, in the state of São Paulo, the richest in the federation, 94% of households have a smartphone, but only 41.7% of these have a computer. Thus, "the cell phone becomes not one, but the only option. The Internet is present in 79.1% of households in the country, and 99.2% of them have access via cell phone". In addition, "directors and teachers do not have the profile (and could not have) of the worker





who masters information and communication technologies" (Martins, Machado, Passone, 2022, p. 16) since they work professionally in another area, which greatly aggravated the difficulty in implementing remote teaching. In this context, curriculum reorganization has become a key element in guaranteeing the right to Education in the return to face-to-face classes in schools.

All the work reported here is only a small part of what is being done to guarantee the right to Education, with access, permanence, and quality. Consequences that have been weakened by the pandemic. Therefore, it is possible to see the work built collectively to guarantee the right to Education through a curricular reorganization. S4d

Finally, it is considered that the objectives of both the School Management and the state management through the Media Center provide for an articulation of theory in practice in relation to the right to Education. Great emphasis was placed on respect for indigenous culture. Such an approach is essential to cultivating respect and maintaining the right of all children to education. S5d

The perception of increased violence at school, whether between pupils or between pupils and teachers, was an aspect highlighted upon returning to face-to-face classes.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has intensified problems that already crossed the school floor. Every day, students are taken to the principal's office because of some event linked to violence or conflict between students with students or students with teachers. These situations affect the right to education, since learning takes place through exchanges and dialogues. However, if there are no conditions for these exchanges to take place, the learning process is compromised. S18d

Nova Escola researched the topic through interviews with teachers and concluded that for 68.8% of respondents, violence has increased, and for 57.4%, the phenomenon may be related to social isolation during the pandemic. "The lack of socialization of students was the factor pointed out by 45% of Education professionals as one of the explanations for the violence practiced in educational institutions" (Melo, 2022) and demonstrated an essential negative consequence of the pandemic period, especially in its most aggressive phase, which pushed the population into social isolation.

This scenario may also explain the fragility in relation to the mental health of the school community, according to one of the reports analyzed.

The psychological situation of students, teachers and employees has been the biggest difficulty encountered by managers in guaranteeing the right to education in face-to-face return. S12d





Research recently developed by Grandisoli, Jacobi and Marchini (2023, p. 6) with teachers from São Paulo indicates that, of the 19,221 participating teachers, 48.2% associated the COVID-19 pandemic with "feelings of fear, sadness, insecurity, anxiety, anguish and uncertainty", evidencing possible incidences of these feelings in teachers' mental health.

Pari passu, the performance of school management in an attempt to guarantee the right to education through the exercise of democratic management was perceived and pointed out, in the Reports, as a positive aspect. According to the reports, in some schools, the management exercised and strengthened, through practice, what Cury (2002, p. 173) defines as democratic management of education that is, at the same time, "transparency and impersonality, autonomy and participation, leadership and collective work, representativeness and competence". The following excerpts also show an articulation between democratic management and the guarantee of the right to education.

It was notable that the management of the school observed, aimed at the right to education, taking many attitudes that promoted accessibility, safety, health, the quality of teaching of teachers, learning, and horizontal power relations, making this a democratic management. It was also possible to observe that the harmony and acceptance of the school community facilitated the work in favor of maintaining this right. S2d

During the CDT meetings I attended and the conversations I had with other colleagues who are doing School Management and Early Years internships at this school, I could see the weight of collective decisions in the school's daily life. I see that the school management of the school intends to educate for and by democracy and participation. I witnessed collective decision-making, the ability to dialogue, argue, and have a voice, and I understood that the concept of "democratic management" is quite complex and goes beyond effective election practices. S6d

In addition, a management that is not democratic creates obstacles for the best decisions to be taken collectively and for students to have their right to education guaranteed and ensured. S12d

This aspect is essential because the right to education must be guaranteed in order to enable reflection on the primary conditions for coexistence in a democratic society. In this sense, strengthening participation, dialog, and collective decision, among others, is to stimulate the broader sense of the right to education. After all, as Souza (2009, p. 127) clarifies, it is not "possible to eradicate authoritarianism by being authoritarian, to build dialog by being demagogic, to overcome violence by acting in a prejudiced way (...) the possibilities of overcoming social inequalities are the agenda of a social/collective action".

The following reports suggest unpromising scenarios in relation to the construction of a school, mediated by school management, which is organized to guarantee the right to





education in its full and broad sense.

The perception that not all schools acted in accordance with the principles of democratic management is expressed in the following report.

The pedagogical coordination, when talking about the role of management during the pandemic and security in the right to education, said that the role of management was to mediate the relationship between students, teachers, and the online system. But at no time did it raise the issue of collective construction, listening to students and teachers, which shows the difficulty in dealing democratically with the real demands that arise and quick agreement with what comes ready from the state. S2n

The comparison between the precepts of the school's Management Plan and the practice developed by the management within it indicated that there was a gap between the provisions of the text and its realization. Resulting in a weakening of the right to education. However, the conclusion that "it is necessary to continue fighting and reaffirming the right to education" demonstrates an important learning.

In the school's Management Plan (2019) it is written that "the school must be democratically offered to all students, without distinction, so that they are not harmed or marginalized" (p. 17), with "equal conditions for access and permanence in school" (p. 14). Meanwhile the State of São Paulo does not offer the basics of both professional and structure. This is one of the examples that guaranteeing rights only on paper, in Law, even though it is already part of a struggle, is not enough, it is necessary to continue fighting and reaffirming the right to education. S1d

The perception of a lack of empathy of school management to face and seek solutions to cases occurring in schools directly linked to teaching-learning sheds light on the need and importance of a more welcoming and humanized treatment. In some cases, they are differentiated to minimize social and individual inequality that can be reflected in learning difficulty.

In a conversation between the guidance counselor and the vice principal, it was reported that a few days ago, a teacher had told a student the phrase, "You read with your mouth and not with your eyes," because the girl could not read what was written. After that, the school management found out that the girl had vision problems, so she could not read. This is an example of how there are several factors that contribute to learning, not only the student's ability. It is the school's responsibility to be aware of these conditions so that the right to education is guaranteed. S18d

The right to education is the same for children of all backgrounds. But sometimes special attention is needed for a particular child. This is because if these children with some disorder or disability are placed in school without





any support, their capacity for learning may be minimized; and therefore, their right to education and full development is not respected. S6n

The Reports present evidence of a serious compromise of the right to education during the pandemic and also in the return to face-to-face classes after the virus contagion cooled down after the popularization of the vaccine. Dimensions of the guarantee of the right to education hitherto considered materialized, such as access and permanence, were strongly affected and had to be reframed. In addition, it was up to school management to innovate in many actions and referrals to ensure that everyone had the right to teaching and learning. The context revealed that, more than ever, it was essential that school management assume the sense that Cury (2007, p. 492-493) attributes to management, an action that implies the new, the different, "a methodological posture that implies one or more interlocutors with whom one dialogue by the art of questioning and by the patience in seeking answers in the art of governing".

### Final considerations

This article aimed to describe and analyze the actions adopted by the school management of public schools to guarantee the right to education in the return to face-to-face classes in the first semester of 2022 based on reports made by Pedagogy students from two classes of Supervised Internship in School Management, one from the night period with 17 students and the other from the day period with 20 students, in the Internship Reports prepared as part of the evaluation of the discipline.

The reports portray an evident compromise of the right to education in the dimensions of access and permanence and demonstrate that historically, more vulnerable groups, such as Youth and Adult Education, were the most exposed. Curricular reorganization, exacerbation of violence at school, and weakening of the mental health of the school community, among others, were aspects that demanded attention and action from school management. Democratic management was recognized as being put into practice in some schools as a way to broaden participation in the discussion and decision of the actions to be undertaken. However, in others, the perception was that the referrals were decided unilaterally, following the superior guidelines without reflection of debate with the school community. Finally, it is worth noting that the observation in the internship allowed the students to conclude that guaranteeing the right to education is a challenge in constant improvement and demands permanent action for its materialization.





Even though the reports present relevant indications of the adversities faced by school management in the return to face-to-face classes, it is worth pointing out questions that still deserve studies and reflections. Pimenta and Sousa (2021, p. 12) point out, through a survey of research, carried out during the pandemic period, "that there was a decrease in the pace of student learning," at least in the perception of public school teachers. In this sense, the question arises: how is the teaching-learning situation in schools today? What actions have been proposed to address the learning gap imposed by years of social isolation?

Eyng, Silva, and Veloso (2021, p. 23), through research that articulated bibliographic, documentary, and field procedures with a qualitative approach, established a dialogue between the right to education, teaching, and evaluation procedures in the pandemic context. They concluded that the right to education was weakened when there was "maintenance of conservative conceptions" reverberating even in "student control, even going so far as to indicate that there was no evaluation" and "emphasis on regulatory strategies, to the detriment of emancipation possibilities". In this sense, it is appropriate to ask: how have the evaluation activities been developed in schools? What meaning and purpose have been given to the evaluation in the return to face-to-face classes?

In the reports analyzed, the relationship between schools and the secretariats was little addressed, even so, it would be appropriate to investigate the possible "dispersion of initiatives by municipal education secretariats", as indicated by Rosa and Martins (2020, p. 91) in a survey with managers from seven municipalities in São Paulo, and a "lack of coordination of education networks during the pandemic", according to the conclusion of a study by Martins, Machado, Passone (2022, p. 17). This aspect is relevant because the secretariats are structures instituted to articulate education, through school education, around an education project, either for municipalities or for states and, also, to respond to the demands requested and needs presented by schools. It is in this sense that schools as a whole constitute education "networks". Knowing and understanding how the secretariats acted in the pandemic context and in the return to face-to-face classes can shed light on explanations for possible setbacks in guaranteeing the materialization of the right to education.

The pandemic period and the immediate post-pandemic period, when it was possible to resume face-to-face classes, had an impact on social relations and, especially, on educational relations within schools, deeply affecting teaching-learning and weakening the right to education. The context revealed that much of what was considered overcome by actions in educational policies, such as access and permanence in school education. It was not so





consolidated, so permanent attention is needed so that the right to education is increasingly strengthened, expanded, and made effective.

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