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The practice of school principals: Acting as workers, public officials, and educational leaders in Brazilian public schools

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UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE

FACULTÉ DE PSYCHOLOGIE
ET DES SCIENCES DE L'ÉDUCATION

The practice of school principals: Acting as workers, public officials, and educational leaders in Brazilian public schools

Dissertation written to obtain the title of
Maître en Sciences de l'Éducation - Analyse et Intervention dans les Systèmes Educatifs (AISE)
Master of Science in Education, Analysis and Intervention in Educational Systems (AISE)

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Resume

This research aimed to analyze school principals' practice in Brazilian public schools. We sought to examine it from three sociological perspectives: school principals as workers (analyzing their actual work), school principals as public officials (analyzing their action in the implementation of an educational public policy), and school principals as educational leaders (analyzing the development of their leadership at school). For this purpose, fieldwork was conducted in four full-time schools (PEI Program) of the São Paulo State education system in Franca, Brazil. The methodology combines semi-directed interviews with four school principals and five deputy principals; and the unstructured observation of one working day of four school principals. The analysis shows that school principals' work routine consists of several unpredicted demands and interruptions, with significant relational work. Moreover, in the case of the PEI Program, the principals showed a great alignment with the policy, acting as true advocates of it locally. Finally, we observed both managerial and leadership approaches in their practice. It was also possible to notice a change and update of the function over time.

Keywords: school principals, school leadership, school management, public schools, educational policies, Brazil.

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*With the hope that the ones in leading positions,
at all levels and everywhere, work towards schools and
societies that enable the existence and development of everyone.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of abbreviations

List of figures

List of tables

1. Introduction.....	10
2. Chapter 1 - School principals and the implementation of educational policies.....	14
2.1 Presentation of the research field.....	14
2.2 Working in an educational institution: School principals as workers.....	19
2.3 Public action applied to education: School principals as public officials.....	22
2.4 The concept of school leadership: School principals as leaders.....	26
2.5 Problem and research questions.....	28
3. Chapter 2 - Methodology and research context.....	30
3.1 Methodology.....	30
3.1.1 Data production: Semi-directed interviews and observation.....	30
3.1.2 Data analysis: Thematization.....	34
3.2 Overview of the Brazilian education system.....	39
3.3 Overview of the <i>Programa de Ensino Integral</i> (PEI) (Integral Education Program) in São Paulo State.....	42
3.4 The fieldwork sample.....	44
4. Chapter 3 - The work of school principals in Brazil.....	48
4.1 Starting to work as a school principal.....	49
4.2 The work from the school principals' perspective.....	53
4.2.1 Division of duties, main demands and supporting networks.....	53
4.2.2 Working style: Concrete cases.....	61
4.3 The work observed in the field: The school principals' working day.....	65
4.4 Discussion.....	72

5. Chapter 4 - Implementing an educational policy: school principals as State officials.....	76
5.1 Motivations and perspectives on the PEI Program.....	77
5.2 Playing chess: The challenges of the implementation process.....	83
5.3 Discussion.....	88
6. Chapter 5 - Exercising leadership: What does it mean to be a school principal?.....	91
6.1 Principals' vision of the role and changes over time.....	92
6.2 Exercising leadership: How school principals act with the school actors.....	97
6.2.1 The students.....	98
6.2.2 The teachers.....	100
6.2.3 The families.....	103
6.3 Principals' main takeaways from the practice.....	105
6.4 Discussion.....	106
7. General discussion and conclusion.....	109
8. Bibliography.....	113
9. Annexes.....	118
Annex I - Interview grid.....	118
Annex II - Curriculum matrix of part-time high schools in the State of São Paulo.....	122
Annex III - Curriculum matrix of full-time high schools in the State of São Paulo.....	124
Annex IV - Duties of Principals and Deputy Principals according to Complementary Laws nº 1.164/2012 and nº 1.191/2012.....	126
Annex V - Link to access the transcriptions of interviews.....	127

List of abbreviations

Brazilian Portuguese	Free translation
MEC - Ministério da Educação do Brasil	MEC - Brazilian Ministry of Education
INEP - Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira	INEP - National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira
IDEB - Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica	IDEB - Index of Basic Education Development
BNCC - Base Nacional Comum Curricular	BNCC - National Curricular Standards
SEDUC-SP - Secretaria da Educação do Estado de São Paulo	SEDUC-SP - São Paulo State Secretariat of Education
DRE - Diretoria Regional de Ensino	DRE - Regional Departments of Education
PEI - Programa de Ensino Integral	PEI - Integral Education Program
COE - Coordenador de Organização Escolar	COE - Coordinator of School Organization / Deputy Principal
PCG - Professor Coordenador Geral	PCG - General Pedagogical Coordinator
PCA - Professor Coordenador de Área de Conhecimento	PCA - Pedagogical Coordinator of Knowledge Area

List of figures

Figure 1 - Global distribution of the EA literature, 1960 to 2018.....	16
Figure 2 - Thematic tree of the data analysis.....	36
Figure 3 - Proportion of student enrollments in full-time high schools by education system, Brazil, 2018-2022.....	42
Figure 4 - Organization chart of PEI schools in the State of São Paulo.....	44

List of tables

Table 1 - Comparison between management and leadership.....	27
Table 2 - Research questions.....	29
Table 3 - Division of the Brazilian basic education system by stage, age, and responsibility.....	39
Table 4 - Selected schools for the fieldwork.....	45
Table 5 - Profile of interviewees.....	47
Table 6 - Division of duties between principals and deputy principals in PEI schools in São Paulo State.....	54
Table 7 - Systematization of school principals' working hours, February 2023.....	66

1. Introduction

Teachers, students, families... What about the school principals?

I usually say that we, as school principals, are the pillar. We cannot let ourselves be shaken, because if we are shaken, what is around us shakes too. So, we must be very strong. (Principal B, Min. 59:41)¹

At present, one of the main challenges for public schools is to ensure, at the same time, access to a universal and quality education for all and opportunities for each student to access self-knowledge and develop themselves. In Brazil, on the one hand, there has been a significant increase in access to schooling in the last decades (Bittar & Bittar, 2012). On the other hand, public schools generally do not achieve either the minimum objectives they set, the learning of curricular content, or their major objective, the full development of individuals (Paro, 2010).

In assuring that schools have a positive and significant impact on students' lives, an actor is crucial, the school principal, who is responsible for organizing the school setting to build an environment leading to teaching, learning, and development. This key figure is responsible for implementing the educational system's policies while handling the specificity of a particular context. According to Pashiardis & Johansson (2016), "currently, school leadership is attracting more and more attention from public policymakers, as scientific evidence points to the role of school managers as fundamental in improving students' academic performance" (p. 1).

The role of school principals in the Brazilian educational system has changed over time. During the dictatorial regimes in Latin America, principals had rather bureaucratic functions. "The most important role of principals was to keep schools running, ensuring all the numerous bureaucratic requirements were met. Sometimes they were expected to build up good schools as

¹In this research, all interviews were conducted in Brazilian Portuguese. The statements transcribed in this text were freely translated into English by the researcher. After each statement, the author of the speech will be indicated, as well as the minute when it appears in the transcription.

expressions of government achievement. This heritage, a hangover from the authoritarian regimes, survives in large sectors of public education, including the principals' traditional role" (Gomes & et al., 2016, quoted in Johansson & Pashiardis, 2016, p. 68).

This role was redefined after the re-democratization and promulgation of the new Federal Constitution (1988) in Brazil when the concept of democratic management of schools became stronger. This movement is part of the historical process of fighting dictatorship and building a democratic society. Therefore, "from this concept, the role of the school principal changes from a simple administrator to a democratic leader, who seeks to be an integrating figure of the school community and a conciliator of different opinions and expectations of this group" (Oliveira & Menezes, 2018, p. 881, free translation).

Not only the role of principals has taken on new forms, but also as the autonomy of schools has become a significant value. Nevertheless, "these changes [of decentralization] meant the local managers and school principals gained strategic importance that they did not have before. In many cases, this meant increased responsibility and involvement in school financial management tasks. However, at the same time, these models minimized the state's responsibilities during the decade, repositioning it more as a regulator than a provider" (Kracwzyk & Vieira, 2008, quoted in Gomes & et al., 2016, in Johansson & Pashiardis, 2016, p. 69).

Thus, it is possible to notice a challenge in school principals' practice regarding two facets of their occupation. In one way, they have technical-administrative work related to the educational system; "invested in the management, they concentrate a suitable power as an agent of the State, which expects from them certain administrative conducts which are not always in accordance with genuine educational objectives" (Paro, 2010, p. 770, free translation). In another way, they also have political-pedagogical work related to the school's specific context. According to Oliveira & Vasquez-Menezes (2018), "one can understand that it is not an entirely bureaucratic-administrative role, but rather a work of articulation, coordination, and intentionality, which, although assumes administrative aspects, essentially connects the principal to the pedagogical management of the school" (p. 881, free translation).

Despite representing a key actor in the educational process, the work of school principals is not studied enough in Brazil. Oliveira & Vasquez-Menezes (2018) analyzed articles and theses on the concept of school management from 2005 to 2015 in Brazilian and international databases.

After an in-depth reading of 101 academic productions, which were then classified into four categories, the results found are very interesting. Most studies in Brazil center on the democratic management and autonomy of schools. Moreover, the authors affirm that “concerning the methodology of the research analyzed, qualitative research is more expressive than quantitative. In addition, most qualitative works are based on bibliographic and documentary research. Many studies, therefore, do not involve empirical discussion, but conceptual discussions based on the literature” (p. 896, free translation).

Most recently, Simielli (2022) analyzed the academic production in Brazil on school management between 1989 and 2019. According to the author, of Brazil’s total number of articles on school management, only 6% were specifically focused on school principals. Simielli (2022) also points out that, in Brazil, most research uses qualitative methodologies; the quantitative studies focus more on descriptive data analysis (pp. 164-169).

Therefore, it is possible to note a gap in the academic field of school management in Brazil. Both regarding the theme, considering the few research on the actual practice of school principals, as well as the methodology, since there are less empirical studies using methodologies such as interviews and observation. Souza (2017) points out that research developed in recent decades in Brazil is closely related to the issues of their own time. After the period of the country’s re-democratization, for example, several studies were developed on the democratic management of schools. The author emphasizes that studies focus more on how schools should be managed and less on how they actually are.

Consequently, this dissertation aims to contribute to a better understanding of the actual practice of school principals in Brazil. Before assessing the impact of their work on the student’s learning and development process, it is necessary to understand better what this work consists of, that is to say: How do they do their job in day-to-day practice? What are their main challenges? How do they exercise leadership? How do they manage tensions between the educational system and the school community? These are questions that are still slightly explored. Then, instead of examining how school management should ideally be, as most studies developed so far do, this research investigates how it works in everyday school life.

The study intends to be framed in the research field of school management, centered on Brazil and the public educational system. Moreover, to understand the work of school principals

in a context of change, the schools chosen for the field work are currently implementing the Integral Education Program (PEI)² in the city of Franca, the countryside of São Paulo State in Brazil. Thus, semi-directed interviews were conducted with four school principals and five school deputy principals, in addition to observation of a whole working day of four school principals.

This study will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter will present the theoretical framework of the research based on the sociology of work, the sociology of public action applied to education, and the concept of leadership in educational institutions. In the second chapter, the context and methodology of the research will be introduced, consisting of a brief presentation of the Brazilian educational system, the Integral Education Program (PEI) in the São Paulo State, and the fieldwork sample.

Then, in the third chapter, the research data analysis sets in. A description of the school principals' work will be presented, based on the observations *in loco* and the interviews: how they organize the teamwork, what their main demands are, how they prioritize and deal with them, and who their supporting network is. Subsequently, in Chapter 4, the role of school principals in the implementation of an educational public policy will be discussed. Regarding the PEI implementation, their motivation to implement the policy, their challenges in this process, and their perspectives on the program will be analyzed.

Finally, in the fifth and last chapter, the analysis will be around their role in the action, how they exercise leadership, and how they interact with colleagues, teachers, students, and families. Moreover, we will also present their own perspective about the school principal's role, their perceptions of how it has changed over time, and their main takeaways so far. Afterward, a conclusive discussion will cover the research's most important highlights and conclusions.

² PEI: Programa de Ensino Integral (in Brazilian Portuguese).

2. Chapter 1 - School principals and the implementation of educational policies

At the time my children were in school, they studied at a private school. So I always wanted that the public school I was working in had the same things because they should have the same rights (Principal A, Min. 25:12).

2.1 Presentation of the research field

Before delving into the theories related specifically to school principals, it is essential to emphasize that the school is a state institution. Especially in Brazil, the process of school expansion and access to schooling is relatively recent. It was only in 2009 that Brazil expanded the compulsory requirement to attend school until the age of 17 years old, gradually implementing a basic, public, free education from early childhood through high school (Scheibe, 2014).

As a state institution, the Brazilian public school has had different contours and incentives throughout different governments. In the past, not so distant from now, access to schooling was restricted to a small part of the population. According to Bittar & Bittar (2012), there were significant incentives for the universalization of Brazilian public schools with the expansion of enrollments in the last three decades. However, “Brazilian public schools continued to expand quantitatively, but the inefficiency of the educational system has been confirmed by performance assessments adopted by the State since then.” (Bittar & Bittar, 2012, p. 164, free translation).

Thus, as well as other countries in the Global South³ Brazil has been able to expand access to education recently; nonetheless, in terms of quality, the country still has much work to do. In that sense, it is important to state that quality should be considered in a broad perspective. On the one hand, students’ academic results measured by standard tests are essential to inform the elementary demands of the educational process, such as the ability to read and write. On the other hand, it is also necessary to consider other fundamental aspects of education, for example, the development of self-knowledge and critical thinking.

³ “The phrase ‘Global South’ refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including ‘Third World’ and ‘Periphery’ that denote regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized. The use of the phrase Global South marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power.” (Dados & Connell, 2012, p.12).

According to Dourado & Oliveira (2009), quoted in Scheibe (2014),

The search for a definition of quality must be from a different perspective than that in which it is predominantly considered the results of the educational action, measured quantitatively. The quality of education involves both intra and extra-school dimensions, which requires us to consider, in addition to the different actors who participate in educational processes, the pedagogical dynamics in schooling offer (teaching-learning processes, curricula, learning expectations), as well as different extracurricular factors that somehow impact educational outcomes. (p. 103, free translation)

It is precisely in the pursuit of quality education that the figure of the school principal stands out. This actor acts as the link between the education system's requirements and each educational institution's reality. In this sense, the school management position is strategic. The principal organizes the school's work to pursue its educational objectives, defined by the school itself, the education system, or an adjustment of those two. According to Lück (2017),

[...] there is a necessity, today, to consider that the development of knowledge and the training of professionals specialized in educational management, capable of implementing and operating the necessary transformations of the education systems and schools, is a priority, as it is a fundamental condition for the essential qualitative leap in Brazilian education. (p. 179, free translation)

Although it has gained prominence lately, the study of school administration started in the 1960s (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019) and has undergone significant changes in concepts and perspectives over time. In analyzing the British system and beyond, Gunter (2017) points out that “while EA [education administration] remains the overarching label of activity nationally and internationally, there have been processes of relabeling in some nation states from administration to management to leadership (Gunter, 2004)” (p. 120). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the differences between these concepts and their implications in terms of analysis.

From an international perspective, the main academic productions in the field of school administration are produced in countries from the Global North. Hallinger & Kovačević (2019) mapped the literature in the area through science mapping from 1960 to 2018. According to the authors, 83% of the academic production in the field comes from four countries: the United States,

the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia (p. 345). The heat map below, elaborated by the authors, presents the geographical distribution of the articles on educational administration analyzed in their mapping.

Figure 1. Global distribution of the EA literature, 1960 to 2018



Source: Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019, p. 344.

It is possible to notice that “the EA knowledge base still suffers from a severe imbalance. Reference to the heat map shows numerous countries ‘missing’ entirely from the knowledge base. More often than not the ‘blank spots’ on the map represent developing societies. This suggests a persisting limitation in the EA knowledge base (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger, 2018c, 2019; Mertkan et al., 2017)” (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019, p. 346).

In the same article, Hallinger & Kovačević (2019) present the changes regarding the subject of research on the field through co-word analysis. It is interesting to observe three points in the field’s evolution. First, in the 1960s and 1970s studies were focused on “administration” and “management”. Secondly, it was just after the 1980s that students started to have a prominent presence in research regarding school management, besides the fact that discussions about “leadership” and “school outcomes” are even more recent. Finally, it is interesting to note the few academic productions in the area that considers aspects of race, gender, and social justice, a perspective to be better developed (pp. 357-361).

Hallinger (2019) also applied science mapping to understand the knowledge production on educational leadership and management in the emerging regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, from 1965 to 2018. According to the author, it was only in the 1990s that academic production in the field became more significant in these regions. The largest number of the articles analyzed are from Asia (83%), followed by Africa (12%) and Latin America (5%) (Hallinger, 2019, p. 219). Thus, it is possible to observe that Latin America is still significantly behind in the academic production of educational leadership and management.

In Brazil, specifically, Souza (2017) highlights two main theoretical lines on school management: classical thinking (from the 1940s to the beginning of the 1970s) and critical thinking (starting from the end of the 1970s / beginning of the 1980s). The most influential representatives of classical thinking are Antônio Carneiro Leão, José Querino Ribeiro, Anísio Teixeira and Benno Sander (p. 2), and those of critical thinking are Miguel Arroyo, Maria de Fátima Félix and Vitor Henrique Paro (p. 2).

Regarding the classical theory of school management in Brazil, Souza (2017) notes that “this conception of the principals as advocates of educational policy correspond to the hegemonic idea at the time that the heads of school were, prior to their duties as educators, official representatives of the State, given their role as heads of an official establishment of the State (the public school) and, as such, they have the duty to embrace the political orientations of the government administration” (p. 3, free translation). Thus, according to this theoretical perspective, school administration is one of the applications of general administration. That is to say that by considering the same types of processes, means, and set of objectives, it would be possible to achieve the expected effectiveness, even considering the specificities of schools.

On the contrary, the critical theory postulates that the objective of education - the full development of individuals - cannot be compared to the objectives of a capitalist enterprise. Therefore, school management has special characteristics, beyond administration. According to this perspective, the practice of the school principals has also a political and pedagogical nature, in addition to the technical-administrative tasks. In pointing out Paro’s work (1988), Souza (2017) argues that “the neglect of the technique of conservative school administration in favor of a likewise conservative political action is the application of a technicism empty of educational purposes, that is to say, this administrative model makes an error not in the definition and

construction of management techniques, but in the untying of this technique to the real educational objectives” (p. 13, free translation).

In this change of perspective from administration to management, Lück (2017) points out that a new paradigm is effectively presented. As stated by the author, “[...] it is possible to conclude that the change is significant, since it is paradigmatic, that is to say, characterized by profound and fundamental changes on how to be and how to do, through a vision’s change of the whole set”. (Lück, 2017, p. 410, free translation). Lück (2017) presents six general aspects of this change: “from a fragmented perspective to a vision of the whole; the expansion of responsibility; from centralization to decentralization; a more dynamic, continuous, and global process; from bureaucratization and hierarchization to coordination and horizontalization; and from individual to collective action” (p. 581, free translation).

According to Souza (2017), in Brazil, “even though it is possible to state that the period of classical thinking’s criticism inspired a sequence of studies in the field during the 1980s to 2000s, it is also possible to observe the emergence of new research’s themes and approaches in the area. This is related to the empirical reality experienced by schools since it is evident the growth of empirical studies in the field from the 2000s onwards” (p. 14, free translation). Thus, the field of school management in Brazil has moved from applying general administration principles in education to more pedagogical concerns and, recently, to the democratic management of schools (Souza, 2017).

As it is possible to note from the literature mentioned below, the field of school management has changed significantly in Brazil and the world. Nowadays, there are many studies on school leadership and the impact of school principals on students’ academic performance. According to Leithwood & et al. (2017),

Using several different sources of evidence, we have argued over the past 10 years that among the wide array of school conditions influencing students, leadership is second only to classroom instruction (e.g., Leithwood et al., 2004; Scheerens et al., 1989; Reetzig & Creemers, 2005). We have also pointed out that, to our knowledge, there are no documented cases of failing schools turning around in the absence of talented leadership (Leithwood et al., 2010). So leadership matters, although how

much it matters often seems to depend on the nature of the evidence being reported.
(p. 1)

However, it is vital to consider three dimensions before examining the impact of school principals' role and the new perspectives on it. First, the actual work of principals in the school daily. Secondly, their action as state officials in charge of implementing educational policies. And finally, the exercise of leadership to mobilize other school actors to accomplish the school's educational objectives. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze their practice considering these three dimensions, which will be detailed in the following sections.

2.2 Working in an educational institution: School principals as workers

So today, I plan what I have to do tomorrow. However, many times, we arrive at school at 7 am, and, at this time, there is already a father for you to attend, a problem that happened, or a robbery that took place in the school, so it changes the whole structure. Hence, how do I organize myself as a school manager? According to what is urgent. (Principal B, Min. 01:13:10).

In their study regarding the directors' work, Gather Thurler & et al. (2017) introduce how the field of work sociology has changed over time, having only recently incorporated the study of the actual activities in a work routine. According to the authors, "for the sociologist, work has long been a paradigm for describing the society as a whole, through the notions of social relations (or social relations of production), social classes, exploitation, domination, power, autonomy, and even social integration" (p. 7, free translation).

In this sense, for a long time, this field of study focused on workers, especially from the perspective of a social category. Gather Thurler & et al. (2017) state that analyzing the work as the activities and tasks has slowly become an object of research. According to Stroobants (1993), quoted in Gather Thurler & et al. (2017), "the sociology of work is a field structured by two competing approaches: one consists of placing professional groups in the major evolutions of society, the other focuses on the activity" (p. 4, free translation). Without undermining the

importance of the first approach, this dissertation will adopt the second one to analyze the actual work of school principals.

In addition to analyzing the actual activities, another critical point in the discussion presented by Gather Thurler & et al. (2017) is to consider the professionals working in school management also as workers, even if they are in a management position. Management professionals were not the focus of the work sociology for a long time, given the critical perspective of exploitation relations. However, according to Barrère (2006), “[...] [The work of school principals] is also made up of bureaucratic routines, tasks more or less predefined by hierarchical levels, or even multidimensional relational work” (p. 3, free translation).

Gather Thurler & et al. (2017) mention that “the work of managers has entered the sociological field through the analysis of organizations (Crozier, 1963, 1965; Crozier & Friedberg, 1977)” (p. 6, free translation), however, with a focus on their attitude and not on their actual work. Barrère (2006) also states that the sociology of organizations focuses more on producing an organizational reality than describing it. The author notices that,

School principals are middle managers, meaning their work and career takes place in a mesosphere between the supervisory bodies (local departments, municipalities, foundations, etc) and their school. [...] School principals as middle managers are responsible for piloting more or less autonomous entities of collective action, daily arbitrating conflicts of interest, justice, and rationality. (Barrère, 2006, p. 19, free translation)

Studying and analyzing school principals’ actual work is extremely important for us to have more clarity about their practice. Despite being in a management position, they also carry out a job consisting of different activities and tasks, in addition to coordinating the work of other school professionals. That way, from the knowledge concerning what their work consists of, it is possible to update perspectives on this function that is key to the educational process.

According to Barrère (2006), the analysis of the actual activity observed in the field is also interesting because work is not just a task, but a subjective experience (p. 23). The author affirms that,

Therefore, analyzing the work of school principals is an attempt to go beyond the observation of the fragmentation of daily tasks and the normative modeling that this type of work makes of it. It also means understanding what makes their specificity, including within the public service. Finally, it means giving back to the school principals as the workers they are, their dilemmas, tensions, fatigue, and very concrete satisfaction since work is always a test of oneself. (Barrère, 2006, p. 4, free translation)

Furthermore, the neo-liberal logic has added new complexities to the work of school principals. The policies of decentralization and autonomy of educational institutions were accompanied by external pressure for results, which these professionals are accountable for. According to Boussard & et al., 2010 (quoted in Gather Thurler & et al., 2017), “finally, neo-management constitutes a general injunction to professionalization: nowadays, this is less an internal demand of professional groups to safeguard their autonomy than an external injunction to efficiency and responsibility” (p. 8, free translation).

In this way, the work of school principals is also conditioned to new ways of managing educational systems based on national and international quality standards. At the same time, these professionals must manage the school in pursuit of these objectives and deal with the local context. As stated by Gather Thurler & et al. (2017),

The association between evaluation and autonomisation tends to bring out new requirements for accountability and quality control, which contribute to constructing more tightly objectified tests in which institutions - and those who run them - can be judged more crudely and harder. These judgments, fair or unfair, can also reflect or overlook the difficulties of the local context. All this leads not only to an increase in the responsibilities of the directors but above all, to a more complex nature of their roles: their political function (building and defending local arrangements) sometimes comes into conflict with their managerial function (obtaining the best figures at the best cost). (p. 13, free translation)

Therefore, in the first place, this dissertation will be interested in the real work of school principals with a focus on their daily activities, tasks, and challenges. This study assumes that it is

necessary to know first before proposing something about or analyzing its possible impacts. As Gather Thurler & et al. (2017) affirms,

Better knowing and understanding the daily activity of the people in place can help in training the next generation and in effective and realistic governance of public action in these areas. It is not a question of describing the work of directors as one can imagine or prescribe it, but of accessing their real work: the tasks they execute, the problems they encounter, the knowledge, the attitudes, and the skills they use in their daily work. (p. 20, free translation)

2.3 Public action applied to education: School principals as public officials

When I arrived here, I found some vices in the school. These are not foreseen in the legislation, so they must end, right? They must end. So... There is State Resolution 56, which is the school principal's profile. We must follow that profile. And on that point, I'm strict, you know? I work with the State, regardless of the political flag it has. I came here to do my function. I didn't come here to raise a political flag. (Principal C, Min. 40:25).

Considering that the public school is a state institution, it is also essential to analyze the work of school principals as public officials. In this perspective, the analysis of their work must consider that these professionals are inserted in an educational system to which they respond. Ultimately, they are the ones who will implement the public educational policies proposed by the State in the particular reality of the school. Therefore, their work is also anchored in the system's guidelines.

According to Hassenteufel (2011), the analysis of public policies was first developed in the United States in the 1950s, focusing on the rationalization of state action based on an economic and managerial approach. According to the author, the first public policy analysts were also the actors of public action. The focus, then, was the optimization of budgetary resources. Therefore, Hassenteufel (2011) states that, at that moment, "policy sciences are focused on public decision-

making, more precisely on decision-making tools, since their objective is to base it scientifically” (p. 49, free translation).

In the 1960s, French works in the field of sociology of organizations point to criticisms concerning this first phase, which is centered on the rationality of public decision-making. According to Hassenteufel (2011), these works “underline the difficulties of the administration to implement the decisions taken, the weakness of the administrative skills, the autonomy of the agents at the counter, and therefore, in the end, the limits of the capacity of the State to solve the problems that it claims to be in charge” (p. 50, free translation).

From the sociology of organizations other aspects started to be considered in the analysis of public policies, as organizational and institutional elements, the actors, conflicts inside the organizations, among others. Hassenteufel (2011) states that,

The attention to the bounded rationality of actors and the importance of inter-individual interactions at the most micro level of public policies leads the sociology of organizations to favor an inductive approach (Musselin, 2005) based on interviews, observation (direct and/or participant) and the collection of first-hand materials (notes, letters, files, etc). (p. 51, free translation)

In this way, a third phase starts in the field of study: the political sociology of public action, an approach that will consider the interaction between actors. According to Hassenteufel (2011), the rational model will be replaced by an attempt to explain public policies based on the characteristics of these interactions. From this moment,

A growing number of researchers advocate abandoning the term ‘public policy’ and replacing it with ‘public action’ (Thoenig, 1998) for three main reasons: first, because it is possible to refer to less state-centric and mainly multilevel public policies; then, to underline the limits of public programs’ coherence and the necessity to deconstruct them; finally, to distinguish more clearly the vocabulary of the actors (who rather use ‘public policies’) from that of the analysts. (Hassenteufel, 2011, p. 56)

Thus, the concept of the State as the center in the public policies’ production gives place to a conception of collective construction of public action through the interaction of different actors

at different levels (Hassenteufel, 2011). According to Porto de Oliveira & Hassenteufel (2021), “to explain the ‘State in action’, the sociology of public action attaches importance to analytical elements that involve the role of ideas, knowledge, institutions, interests, instruments, individuals and gender” (p. 16, free translation).

Mazeaud & Nonjon (2021) indicate that, although professionals working in public action do not compose a homogeneous professional group, the relational dynamics between these actors impact public action. In this sense, this dissertation does not propose to analyze the practice of school principals specifically as a professional group since we are more interested in their actual work in a particular context. However, it is interesting to analyze the practice of these actors according to their professional socialization as public officials. As stated by Mazeaud & Nonjon (2021),

Studying them [the policy workers] does not mean simply identifying their existence. It also involves analyzing, through the lens of the sociology of professional groups, their social characteristics, their status and values, their beliefs, and practices, that is to say, their professional socialization, to clarify how, in a specific situation, they execute their work and, therefore, contribute to public action. It is also about understanding the existence of asymmetries of resources and positions or even power relations. (p. 357, free translation)

Therefore, the State regulates school principals’ work based on a hierarchical and sectoral organization of the administrative work, as highlighted by Mazeaud & Nonjon (2021) concerning the public function itself. However, Mazeaud & Nonjon (2021) also state that “the work of public officials is partially determined by the formal rules of administration. The informal rules that regulate professional systems are equally important” (p. 358, free translation).

Then, although school principals are public officials inserted in a regulated system, we can also analyze what is their room for maneuvering when implementing public policies in the particular context of the school. Mazeaud & Nonjon (2021) state that these professionals, as intermediary managers, can apply, mold, and give sense to the system’s guidelines according to their understanding, reference, and perspective. Thus, school principals do not necessarily need to “be contented with functioning in a bureaucracy where all their acts are predefined, but they have to create adapted responses so that the purpose of the action is achieved (Jeannot, 2008, p.123)”

(Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2021, p. 359, free translation). In that sense, as pointed out by Lipsky (1980) in his famous concept of street-level bureaucrats, these professionals who are “at the edge” of the system exercise a discretionary power in the implementation of public policies.

Another interesting concept to analyze the relationship between school principals and their supervisors is the loosely coupled systems presented by Weick (1976). According to the author, in a system, actors are loosely coupled by common variables to their actions. “The image is that the principal and the counselor are somehow attached, but that each retains some identity and separateness and that their attachment may be circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual affects, unimportant, and/or slow to respond” (Weick, 1976, p. 4).

Weick (1976) suggests some potential functions of this concept in the educational field, among which two are particularly interesting in analyzing school principals’ practice regarding the educational system. First, the author suggests that a loosely coupled system may be a good system for localized adaptation (p. 7). In an education system that intends to offer a universal education to all, it is possible to analyze the role of school principals in locally adapting proposals to prevent a total standardization of education. Secondly, Weick (1976) states that “since some of the most important elements in educational organizations are teachers, classrooms, principals, and so forth, it may be consequential that in a loosely coupled system, there is more room available for self-determination by the actors” (p. 8).

Thus, it is possible to investigate the practice of school principals as public officials, considering both the regulation of their work and the autonomy they have or not in their professional practice. In this context, we must also consider the changes in the logic that drive and impact public structures, such as the New Public Management⁴ (NPM). On the one hand, reforms anchored in managerial principles, such as focusing on results, evaluation, and accountability, certainly impact public officials’ work. On the other hand, Demazière & et al. (2013) state that they are also translated, interpreted, and transformed at the local level by professional practices.

⁴ “The New Public Management (NPM) is a doctrine of reference to orient and configure numerous reforms introduced in public administrations and sectors in North America, Anglo-Saxon countries, and continental Europe. It designates a significant movement aimed at the in-depth reorganization of administrative systems by transferring management methods reserved to private firms and implementing managerial instruments, such as a culture of results, performance measurement, contracting, accountability, and customer approach.” (Demazière & et al., 2013, p. 6, free translation).

Therefore, it will be possible to see that the manner school principals implement educational policies is also related to the exercise of leadership in the school community.

2.4 The concept of school leadership: School principals as leaders

So, I'm inside the process, I'm not an isolated figure, I'm with them. That way, it's easy to lead, why? I bring them to my side, I show that we're together and then I don't have some issues that some school principals have, some problems, accusations, work that is not done, there's no way not to do it, because I'm here together with them! (Principal D, Min. 01:02:31).

Currently, the concept of school leadership is widely used in the literature on school administration. Gunter (2016) states that the concept “within educational services and organizations, has grown rapidly as a field of practice and study in the last thirty years. This can be evidenced through increased adoption of the labels of ‘leader’, ‘leading’ and ‘leadership’ for educational professional practice, whereby professional titles such as principal, headteacher and president are used interchangeably with, and increasingly subsumed by, the leadership lexicon” (p. 5).

It is worth emphasizing the conceptual differences between administration, management, and leadership, terms that evolved in this order in the field of school administration, as seen above. According to Bush (2022), “management and administration indicate managerial processes that maintain the balance of organizations, such as planning, organization, coordination, and control. Leadership indicates change-related functions, such as setting a vision and goals for the school and motivating its parts to move toward achieving them” (p. 11, free translation).

In his chapter on school leadership theories, Bush (2022) presents a comparative table between management and school leadership.

Table 1. Comparison between management and leadership

Elements	Management	Leadership
Main focus	Execution and efficiency	Values and purpose
Power	Positional authority	Influence
Structure	Hierarchy	Fluid
Processes	Technical-rational	Open and fluid
Accountability	Vertical	Multidirectional
Work allocation	Delegation	Distribution
Relations	Transactional	Transformational

Source: Bush (2019) quoted in Bush (2022). Adapted. Free translation.

Therefore, leadership can be related to influence, and, in this way, it is possible to analyze how school principals influence other school actors in the direction of the objectives they aim for. According to Lück (2017),

Education systems and schools, as social units, are living and dynamic organisms [...]. Thus, as they are characterized by a network of relationships between the elements that directly or indirectly interfere with them, their leadership, organization and direction demand a new orientation approach. (p. 435, free translation)

Bush (2022) presents different conceptions of leadership developed in the literature: managerial leadership, bureaucracy, managerialism, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, moral leadership, distributed leadership, teaching leadership, and contingency leadership (pp.13-18). This dissertation will analyze school principals' leadership globally with no intention of characterizing it in a single conception. The point of view expressed in this study is that a leader can exercise leadership by combining different notions of it.

Brest (2011) corroborates the idea that school principals can use different leadership perspectives in their day-to-day practice. According to the author, "to improve the functioning of a school for the benefit of students, different perspectives can be combined, resulting in countless combinations" (p. 347, free translation). Therefore, he highlights that "according to the context,

school principals must know whether to base their action on one aspect of the concept or another, guided by their ethical considerations” (p. 347, free translation).

As well as it is possible to use different leadership strategies depending on the context, we can also question the total dissociation between management and leadership practices. According to Yvon (2019), a school needs both a manager - who will ensure the institution is functional - and a leader - who will build the collective sense within the institution’s actors. Yukl (2002), quoted in Bush (2022), remarks that the managerial approach uses standardized responses, while leaders adapt their responses according to each specific situation. At some point, school principals can use both approaches depending on the context. Bush (2022) also points out that,

Management, considered limited and technical, has been continually discredited and discarded; however, it is an essential component of successful leadership since it guarantees the implementation of the school’s vision and strategy. The management without a vision is duly criticized as ‘managerialism’, but a vision without effective implementation is doomed to frustration. (p. 19, free translation)

Thus, we will observe that in their professional practice, school principals exercise leadership and use managerial approaches, depending on the situation and objectives. This fact may occur because, on the one hand, their function is framed by a specific system, and, on the other hand, they have a certain autonomy in their actual work. In a specific situation, school principals may make a decision based on the rules pre-established by the Department of Education. In another situation, they may prefer to mobilize school actors to take collective decisions under their leadership. Hence, this observation reinforces the importance to consider the three aspects mentioned in this chapter is essential to analyze the work of school principals.

2.5 Problem and research questions

As presented in this chapter, school principals are decisive actors in the educational process since they are the link between the educational system and a particular school. The study field of school administration has changed over time and is relatively recent, mainly in Latin America and Brazil. Little by little, school principals are no longer seen as mere administrators or managers to be considered leaders in their educational establishments nowadays.

In this sense, many studies currently focus on the impact of school principals' work on students' academic performance. However, there are fewer studies, especially in Brazil, concerning their actual work. Besides that, it is important to note that these professionals occupy a unique position as public officials responsible for implementing public policies in a given context. Therefore, before investigating the impact of their work, it is crucial to understand what this work consists of and how school management actually takes place. For this reason, this dissertation intends to investigate school principals' practice in their day-to-day work in Brazilian public schools, considering their public function and their ability to exercise leadership. In front of this problematic, three research questions will guide this research:

Table 2. Research questions

General questions	Specific questions
1) What does the work of school principals in Brazilian public schools consist of?	What types of demands do principals have? How do they prioritize their demands? How do they organize their daily work?
2) How do school principals implement an educational policy in their respective schools?	How is their adherence to the policy in question? What are their main challenges in the implementation process? How do they deal with the expectations of the education system and the school community?
3) How do school principals exercise leadership in their daily school routine?	What do school principals think about their role in the educational process? Is there a gap between what they think and what they actually do? What are the main challenges and the main takeaways highlighted by them about their position?

Source: Campos Cardoso (2023).

In the following section, the methodology used to answer these questions will be presented, as well as the context chosen for the development of this research.

3. Chapter 2 - Methodology and research context

Thank you. It is very good that you came. And I think this is the way. We need to study, to analyze, so we can show other perspectives. From these studies, there is the possibility of change, when we stop to see the other, right? (Deputy Principal A, Min. 58:06).

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Data production: Semi-directed interviews and observation

In order to answer the research questions presented in the previous section, this research proposes to conduct an empirical qualitative study. The methodology chosen combines semi-directed interviews with the actors responsible for the school management in Brazilian public schools: the principals and the deputy principals; and the unstructured observation of one working day of school principals.

According to Vermersch (2019), the interview technique is “a set of listening practices based on grids for identifying what is said and techniques for formulating relaunches (questions, reformulations, silences) which aim to help, to accompany the putting into words of a particular area of the experience concerning various personal and institutional goals” (p. 9, free translation).

The choice for semi-directed interviews is part of a comprehensive approach, contrary to a positivist-explanatory logic that starts from a pre-established hypothesis. According to Matthey (2005), in comprehensive logic, researchers investigate the social meanings individuals build about the research’s object. This way, the hypotheses are emergent and can change in the process. Therefore, the researcher’s objective is to favor discourse production, creating favorable conditions for the interviewees’ participation, in an inductive logic of discovery.

This study considers three key assumptions about the situation of an interview: the fact that it is a social interaction, it is the meeting of individual subjectivities, and the need for active listening and a benevolent attitude. In this way, as a researcher, my objective is to go toward the other person’s experience. The interviewee is the expert of his/her own experience, and, for this

reason, his/her narrative is considered valid data, which I place trust in. The posture I sought to exercise in the interview situation is one of genuine curiosity. I recognize my own values and assumptions, but I give space to the expression of the other.

Several authors developed the idea of the interview as a social interaction, such as Bourdieu (1993), Matthey (2005), and Demazière (2008). Likewise social interactions, each interview is a unique situation and demands its own adjustments. Matthey (2005) affirms that as a social practice, the interview requires “not only a technical skill (know-how) but also behavioral (know-how to live), emotional (know-how to be), and strategic (know-how to access) skills” (p. 9, free translation). For this reason, Bourdieu (1993) talks about the interviewer’s work as a profession, stating that it’s not just an,

[...] abstract and purely intellectual knowledge but the incorporated product of all previous research; a profession as a real ‘disposition to pursue the truth’, which disposes to improvise on the field, in the urgency of the interview situation, the self-presentation strategies and adapted distributions, the endorsements and adequate questions, in such a way as to help the interviewee to deliver his/her truth, or better, to get rid of his/her truth. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 920, free translation)

Concerning this point, it was interesting to note that having been a student in the same education system in Franca⁵ and, today, a master’s student at the University of Geneva established a connection of great admiration with the interviewees. Even though I had never worked as a school principal, not knowing the interviewees’ actual work, my interest in the subject was received with great enthusiasm and as an acknowledgment of their work. Moreover, each interview was a different and unique situation, depending on the interviewee, the time of the day, the conditions, and the location.

Precisely because it is a social interaction, the interview can be seen as a meeting of subjectivities. Matthey (2005) states that the meeting of each participant’s autonomous subjectivity gives rise to an intersubjectivity in the interview situation, a co-constructed relationship. For the author, researchers must be aware of their own subjectivity, recognizing and observing it in the

⁵ The researcher studied until high school in public schools of the São Paulo State education system in the city of Franca. The schools chosen for the fieldwork are also part of the same education system and located in the same city, although they do not coincide with the schools the researcher attended.

research process. This point of view underscores the importance of recognizing that no science is purely neutral. There is always a starting point of reference that we must consider in a critical self-reflection procedure.

In that regard, my feelings during the interviews were observed not as an object of this research but for my own formative process as a researcher. Surely, I had my research object in mind and predetermined questions, but I had to assume a flexible attitude to welcome what was brought up in each interview and observe the impact of it on myself. An interesting example is that one of the interviewees responded to my questions in a very objective and short way, generating some frustration. During the interview process, I reflected on my own practice, how I was framing the questions, and how I was building an environment so the interviewee could express himself/herself in greater detail.

Furthermore, active listening and a benevolent attitude are essential to reduce symbolic violence in the interview situation (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu (1993) states that the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is asymmetrical and requires attention and caution on the researcher's side. Therefore, it is necessary to get out of the "expert" position to donate oneself to the meeting with the other and be at the disposal of one's speech production (Matthey, 2005). Bourdieu (1993) invites us to forget ourselves in the interview situation, in a true "spiritual exercise" (p. 906).

Active listening and a generous attitude proved essential during the fieldwork. For example, in a specific interview, the interviewee cried for a while when narrating a case of what he/she was experiencing at the school at the time. Thereby, I realized that it is not helpful to adopt a completely neutral and distant posture as a researcher. Because what lets us access the experience of others is precisely our meeting as human beings and, therefore, it is necessary to adopt an empathic and responsible posture in the face of the other's living through.

For all these reasons, Matthey (2005) defends the idea that this methodology is an intellectual and existential posture in addition to an instrument (p. 2). Hence, the comprehensive interview allows us to access not only the speech of others but also the social meanings they create about the research object. This approach is challenging since it requires the researcher to renounce the questions' directness while ensuring the interview's structure (Matthey, 2005, p. 3).

As an intellectual posture, my conduction of the interviews improved throughout the process. As Vermersch (2019) reminds us, the interview technique is a know-how that requires practice. So, for example, in the interviews at the end of the fieldwork, I was less attached to my interview grid and more open to the spontaneity of the process. As Demazière (2008) states, the sociologist needs to develop a “benevolent neutrality”, adapting the situation according to the interviewees’ characteristics, which is only possible with exercise.

This dissertation also benefited from the perspectives of the explicitness interview (Vermersch, 2019), which aims to lead the verbalization of an action. According to Vermersch (2019), “if by action, I designate the realization of a task, the explicitness interview aims at the description of this action’s progress, as it was actually implemented in a real task” (p. 10, free translation). In order to access the explicitness of the school principals’ actual work, that is, how they do their work, we seek to ask questions related to stories. Thus, interviewees were asked for concrete examples of their professional situations at different times during the interviews.

Vermersch (2019) defends the idea that the execution of every action contains an implicit aspect, which justifies the technique of explicitness. The author states that

Moreover, this unfolding of action is the only reliable source of inferences to highlight the reasoning actually implemented (different from those adopted outside the action’s engagement), to identify the goals actually pursued (often different from the ones we think to pursue), to identify the theoretical knowledge actually used in practice (often different from that mastered in courses), to identify representations or preconceptions that are sources of difficulties. (p. 10, free translation)

For this research, interviews were conducted with four principals and five deputy principals between January and February 2023 in Franca, São Paulo, Brazil. The interview grid is presented in Annex I. All interviewees work in public schools in the education system of São Paulo State. Their profiles will be presented later in Table 5 of this Chapter.

In order to access the actual work, we also adopt the observation methodology to complement the interviews. Vermersch (2019) highlights that “it seems essential to remember that to understand and analyze the progress of the action, there are not only verbalizations. On the contrary, the verbalizations will often complement the information provided by what is observable

(if there is an observer) and the traces of the realization of the action (draft, intermediate results still visible)” (p. 11, free translation).

It is essential to mention that the observation methodology used in this dissertation was strongly inspired by the work of Gather Thurler & et al. (2017) carried out in schools and socio-sanitary establishments, even if it has not been applied in such a detailed and robust manner. The authors mention that,

To refine the grain of the analysis, we, therefore, practiced *shadowing*, a method of observation from North American professional orientation instruments which consists of following a professional ‘like his/her shadow’ for a specific time [...] and noting everything that can be used to ‘discover the work’. (Gather Thurler & et al., 2017, p. 41, free translation)

Therefore, in this research, we observed an entire working day of the four school principals participating in the study. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to focus on observing the work of principals and deputy principals separately. Therefore, priority was given to observing the work of school principals, the main focus of this study. However, at some moments, due to the absence of the school principal (for example, at lunchtime), the work of the deputy principals was also observed. The observations occurred during school functioning hours in February 2023, from Monday to Thursday, and from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm.

3.1.2 Data analysis: Thematization

The first step in analyzing the data produced in the research was transcribing the recorded audio of the interviews. For this, the software *Transcript* was used in the artificial intelligence support mode, that is, this device transforms the audio into text with high precision. However, the researcher must still refine the transcription concerning elements not identified by the artificial intelligence: words, sounds, pauses, or breaks in speech. For this research, approximately 11 hours of recorded audio and 211 pages of transcribed text were produced. Since the objective of the analysis was centered on the content and meaning of the interviewees’ speech, punctuation was used in the transcriptions.

After transcribing the interviews, the second step was the speech analysis. For this, the thematization methodology was used, inspired by the Chapter “The thematic analysis” by Paillé & Mucchielli (2012). According to the authors,

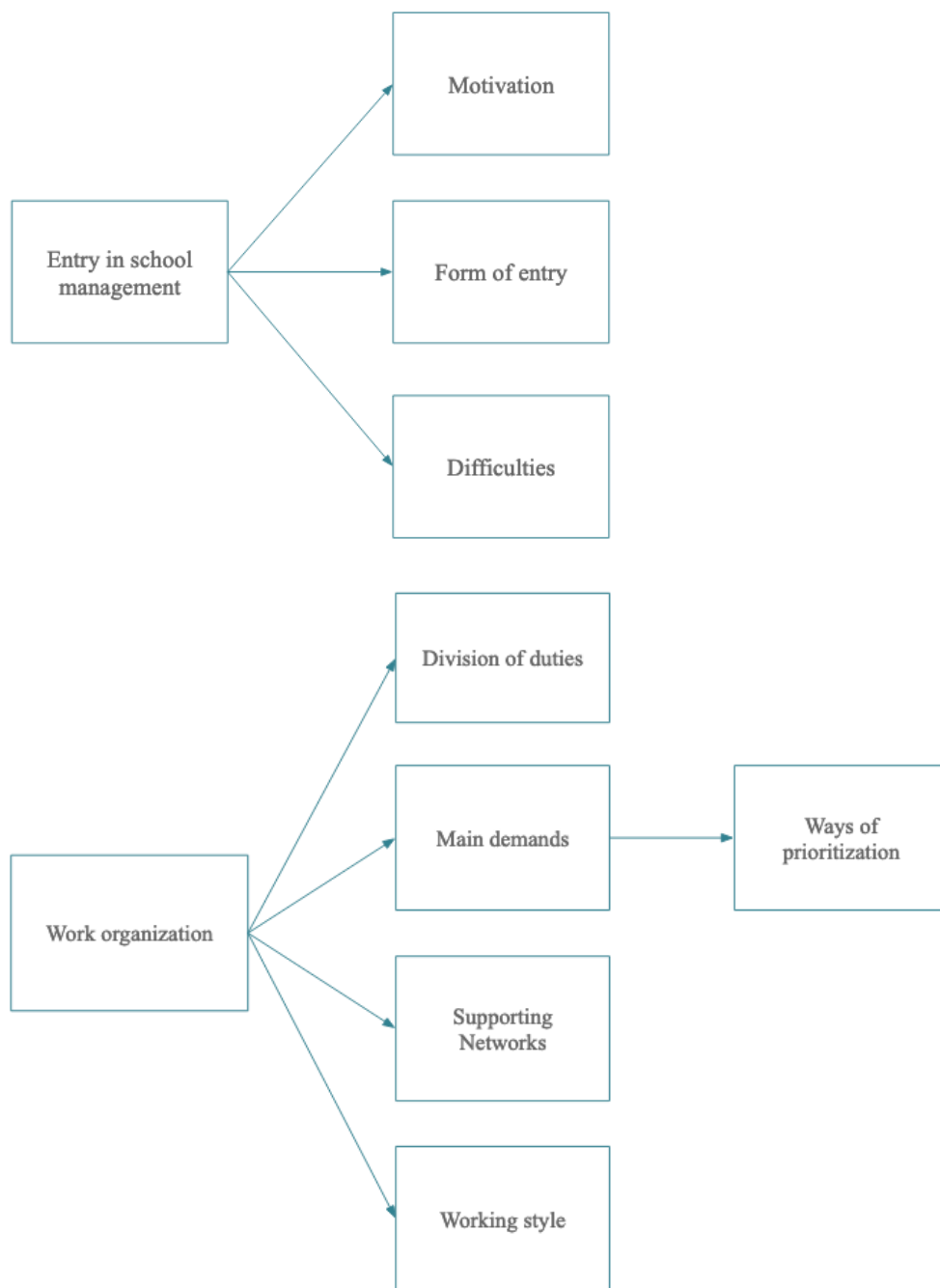
With thematic analysis, thematization constitutes the major operation of the method, namely the transposition of a given corpus into a certain number of representative themes of the content analyzed and in relation to the research orientation (the problematic). The thematic analysis consists, in this sense, of proceeding systematically to the identification, grouping, and, alternatively, to the discursive examination of the themes addressed in a corpus, whether it is a transcription interview, an organizational document or observation notes. (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012, p. 2, free translation)

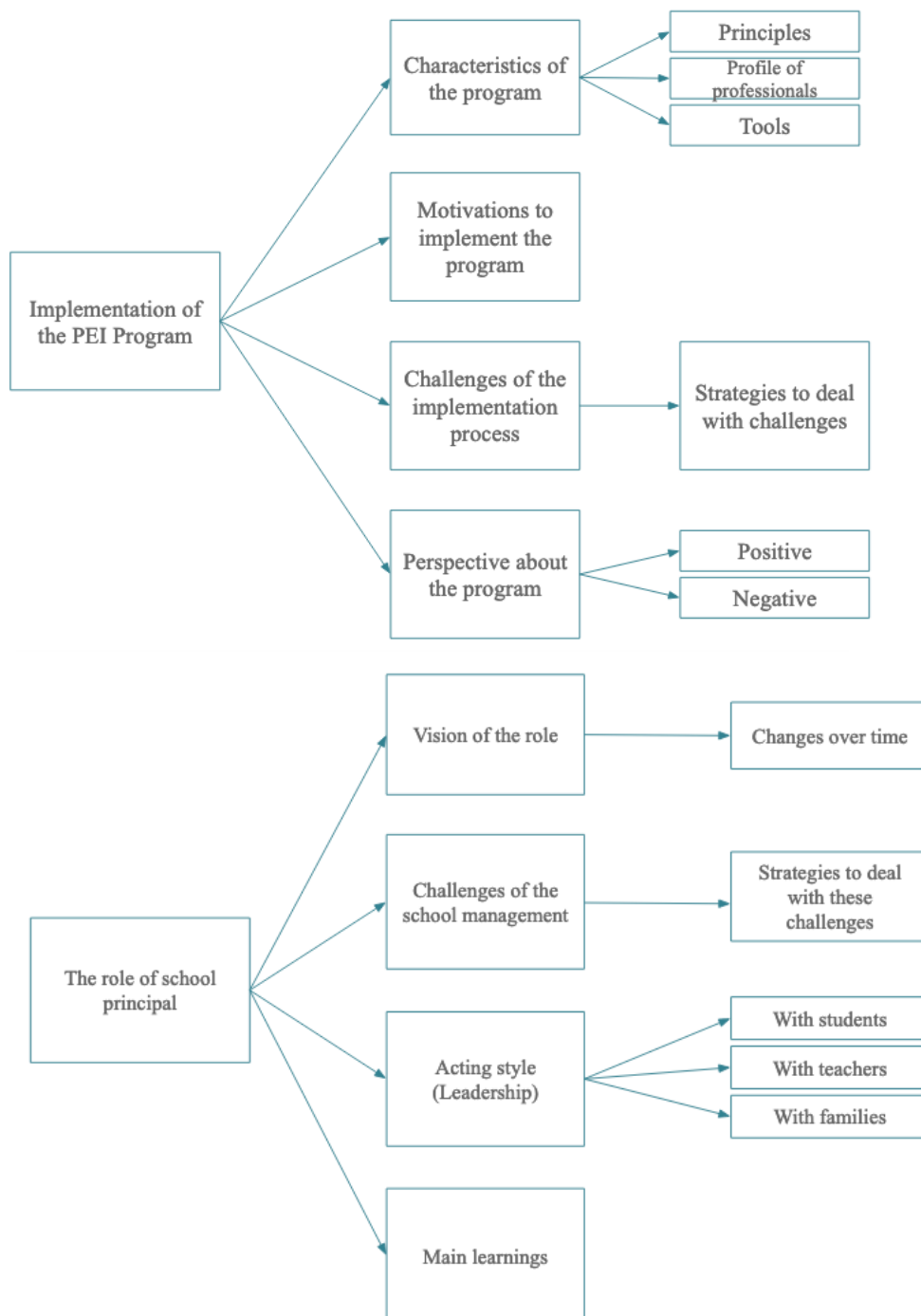
Then, thematic analysis proposes identifying all themes relevant to the research object, drawing parallels between them, and building an overview of significant trends in the studied phenomenon (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012). According to the authors, “it is not simply a matter of identifying themes, but also of verifying whether they repeat from one material to another and how they separate, connect, contradict and complement each other” (p. 2, free translation).

The approach chosen in this research was that of continuous thematization. According to Paillé & Mucchielli (2012) “what characterizes the continuous thematic approach is that the thematic tree is built progressively, throughout the research, and is only completed at the end of the materials’ analysis” (p. 7, free translation). It is also essential to specify that a theme is a set of words that allow one to understand what is addressed in an excerpt of the related material, indicating speech content (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012).

Thus, the thematization occurred in three stages. First, an exploratory reading of each interview was carried out, with the marking of interesting passages. Then, a second reading of the material was carried out, identifying the themes (thematization process). After that, an inventory of themes was created, with an overview of prominent elements. This process was done successively for all interviews. Once an inventory of themes was built for all interviews, these data were entered into the *NVivo* software for comparison. In *NVivo*, it was possible to realize the cross-analysis and regrouping of the themes identified in all interviews. The final thematic tree (Figure 2) was built after putting the themes in relation and refining them in the software.

Figure 2. Thematic tree of the data analysis





Source: Campos Cardoso (2023).

As highlighted by Paillé & Mucchielli (2012), “the idea is to identify the essence of the content and not perform a perfect technical coding” (p. 14, free translation). Thus, from the interviewees’ own words, we can identify themes brought up in their speech. Moreover, it is extremely important to ensure that the researcher’s posture is letting the interviewees speak

through the research and not for it (Large, 2007, quoted in Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012). In this way, throughout the thematization, some themes disappear, others appear, and others are regrouped in a constant exercise of putting the themes in relation. According to Paillé & Mucchielli (2012),

In fact, the rule that could be enacted about the work of thematic analysis is that it consists of grasping and rendering the subject's essence and not deciphering and demonstrating it. Supposing the analyst conducts his/her analysis properly and succeeds in correctly grasping and summarizing the message delivered by the interviewee or the content of the document analyzed, then the most important signifiers will be signified. (p. 33, free translation)

At this point, it is essential to mention that the analysis does not intend to categorize school principals or provide an evaluation of what is an ideal school principal. The objective of the analysis is to understand the actual work of these professionals and how they act in practice as public officials and school leaders. Therefore, the thematic analysis is appropriate to the objective of the research.

In addition to analyzing the interviews, it was also necessary to reflect on how to give sense to the data produced in the observation *in loco*. After the data production, the aspects noted during the observation process were organized as follows:

Time period: time slot observed.

Actor: observed actor (school principal or deputy school principal).

Activity: task realized during the observation.

Place: location where the activity is carried out (for example, principal's office, secretariat, etc).

Support: a person with whom the main actor works together to accomplish the task, if applicable.

Notes: relevant and context commentaries about the observed situation.

Afterward, some interesting information was highlighted, such as the period that school principals spend at school, with whom they interact during their working day, and with whom they work most in the execution of their tasks. Hence, these data will be used for descriptive purposes of the actual work of school principals, which will be addressed in Chapter 3 of this research and in which it will be possible to find the complete observation data ([Table 7](#)).

3.2 Overview of the Brazilian education system

Before going into details of the fieldwork sample, it is necessary to explain the research context. First of all, Brazil is the researcher's origin country, which is why the research focuses on the Brazilian context. Although the study was carried out in the context of a master's degree in Europe, it was considered important that the knowledge produced could serve the Brazilian reality, especially since it is a Global South country. That said, the Brazilian educational system will be generally presented.

Brazil is a 214,3⁶ million population country divided into 26 federative units (States) and 1 Federal District. In these States, we have 5,570 municipalities. The basic education system is organized in Table 3.

Table 3. Division of the Brazilian basic education system by stage, age, and responsibility

School stage	Age	Prior responsibility
Early childhood education	0 to 3 years old	Municipalities
Preschool	4 to 6 years old	Municipalities
Elementary education	6 to 14 years old	Municipalities and States
Secondary education	15 to 17 years old	Municipalities and States

Source: Elaborated by Campos Cardoso (2023). Primary source: Federal Constitution of Brazil (1988, art. 211, § 2 and § 3).

As seen in Table 3, elementary and secondary education is a shared responsibility of States and Municipalities. However, state education systems are generally responsible for high schools such as those selected for this research. In its turn, the federal government is responsible for “[...] organizing the federal education system [...] funding federal public education institutions and exercising, in educational matters, a redistributive and supplementary function, in order to guarantee the equalization of educational opportunities and a minimum standard of quality in education through technical and financial assistance to the States, the Federal District and the Municipalities” (Brazil, 1988, free translation). Besides that, the federal government articulates basic and higher education.

⁶Source: World Bank, 2021.

To better understand the education system's size in Brazil, it is interesting to inform some data. In 2022, Brazil had 47.382.074 students in total, 49% of students enrolled in municipal schools, 31.2% in state schools, 19% in private schools, and 0.8% in federal schools.⁷ Regarding secondary education, the stage analyzed in this research, in the same year, Brazil had 7.866.695 high school students in total, 84.2% of students attending state schools, 12.3% private schools, 3% federal schools, and 0.5% municipal schools⁸. Then, most high school students in Brazil study in public state schools.

A significant characteristic concerning the Brazilian education system is the differences between the public and private sectors. Generally, private schools are of better quality in basic education than public schools, both in terms of infrastructure and opportunities for integral development. Nonetheless, this reality is the contrary in higher education since public universities are better evaluated and, therefore, more competitive to enter. The severe consequence is that students from more wealthy families can access quality higher education more easily. This fact is ruthless in an unequal country such as Brazil, where studies point out that years of schooling contribute significantly to revenue growth (Bonadia, 2008).

The results of public high schools in Brazil exemplify the educational inequalities in the dropout rate and academic performance. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE – *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*), the high school net enrollment rate, the percentage of young people aged 15 to 17 years enrolled in this stage, was 75.4% in 2020⁹. In the same year, 4.8% of students enrolled in public high schools abandoned before concluding¹⁰. Regarding the SAEB¹¹'s results in 2019, in the last year of high school, only 31% of public school students had an adequate level of Portuguese learning. When it comes to Mathematics, the situation is even more dramatic since only 5.2% of students had an adequate level¹².

⁷ Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP). *Censo Escolar 2022* (School Census). <<https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/pesquisas-estatisticas-e-indicadores/censo-escolar/resultados/2022>>

⁸ Idem.

⁹ *Todos pela Educação (2021). Anuário Brasileiro da Educação Básica*. <https://todospelaeducacao.org.br/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Anuario_21final.pdf>

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica* (Basic Education Evaluation System).

¹² Idem.

At this point, it is essential to highlight that discussions about reformulations and improvements in secondary education in Brazil are longstanding. In 2017 the federal government approved Law nº 13.415/2017, known as “*Novo Ensino Médio*” (New High School). This proposal established a change in the structure of this school stage, increasing the student’s minimum period at school from 800 to 1.000 hours a year and defining a new and more flexible curriculum¹³. With serious legitimacy problems, the proposal has been heavily criticized by important actors in the education sector, but for the time being, it remains valid for all schools.

The problems related to secondary education in the country are complex and involve different variables, such as poverty and demotivation (Salata, 2019). Most schools run part-time, in the morning, afternoon, or even in the evening. In this educational stage, schools often compete with the labor market, and many students, especially from disadvantaged families, drop out to work and contribute to the family income. Then, part-time education is essential to keep working students in school, even if the full-time model presents better opportunities for integral development.

In front of the structural educational inequalities and the challenges of secondary education, it is even more challenging for public school principals to organize their schools to offer quality education to students. Concerning these professionals, the country counted 162.847 school principals working in 178.300 basic education schools in 2022, according to Brazilian Ministry of Education data. Among them, 80.7% are female, 90% have higher education, and only 19.3% attended continuing training in school management¹⁴.

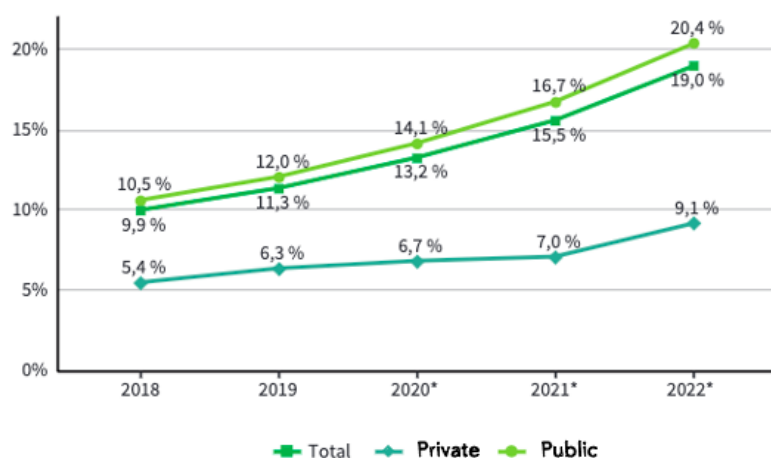
Despite systemic limitations, it is possible to find excellent pedagogical projects and academic results in public schools nationwide, with particular emphasis on full-time high schools. Recently, an effort has been made to increase full-time schools (Figure 3), which are already showing better results. In 2016, the Ministry of Education (MEC) launched the *Programa de Fomento às Escolas de Ensino Médio em Tempo Integral* (EMTI) (Full-time High Schools Support Program). According to MEC, “the program aims to support the public education systems of the States and the Federal District to offer the extension of the school period and the integral and

¹³ <<http://portal.mec.gov.br/component/content/article?id=40361>>

¹⁴ Ministry of Education. Presentation of the *Censo Escolar* 2022 (School Census). <https://download.inep.gov.br/censo_escolar/resultados/2022/apresentacao_coletiva.pdf>

integrated formation of the student”¹⁵. For this, the National Fund for Education Development (FNDE – *Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação*) transfers financial resources to support the implementation of full-time high schools by the States.¹⁶

Figure 3. Proportion of student enrollments in full-time high schools by education system, Brazil, 2018-2022



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP). *Censo Escolar* 2022. (School Census). Adapted by Campos Cardoso (2023). Free translation.

Next, the policy development in the São Paulo State will be presented.

3.3 Overview of the *Programa de Ensino Integral* (PEI) (Integral Education Program) in São Paulo State

Primarily, it is important to mention that the education system in São Paulo State is decentralized. The central body is the Secretariat of Education (SEDUC-SP). The state is divided into 91 Regional Departments of Education (DRE). These divisions represent SEDUC-SP locally, coordinating and supervising the planning and execution of administrative-pedagogical activities in state schools in their areas of responsibility. For example, the Regional Department of Education of Franca is responsible for the follow-up of state schools in 10 cities in the region¹⁷. Therefore, the closest contact between schools and the education system occurs through the Regional Departments of Education.

¹⁵ < <http://portal.mec.gov.br/publicacoes-para-professores/30000-uncategorised/55951-politica-de-fomento-a-implementacao-de-escolas-de-ensino-medio-em-tempo-integral-emi>>

¹⁶ <<https://www.fnnde.gov.br/index.php/programas/programas-suplementares/ps-ensino-medio/ps-emi>>

¹⁷ <<https://defranca.educacao.sp.gov.br/institucional/>>

In São Paulo State, the *Programa de Ensino Integral* (PEI) was established in 2012 through Law nº 1.164, of January 4th, 2012. According to information provided by the Secretary of Education, in 2023, the State currently has 2.314 full-time high schools, with 1.2 million students in 491 municipalities¹⁸. The schools offer two formats of the program: seven or nine hours of schooling. In the first one, there are two shifts: from 7 am to 2 pm and from 2:15 pm to 9:15 pm. In the second one, classes occur between 7 am and 4 pm.

First, it is interesting to mention the pedagogical differences between part-time and full-time high schools. In São Paulo, students have 35 classes per week in part-time schools, divided into basic core according to the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular*¹⁹ (BNCC) and six formative paths chosen by students (Annex II). In full-time schools, students have 43 classes per week, divided into basic core, referring to the BNCC, a diversified part of the curriculum with three formative paths, and four complementary activities (Annex III). The PEI program is based on four principles: interdimensional education, pedagogy of presence, the four pillars of education for the 21st century, and youth protagonism²⁰.

Comparing the two curriculum matrices, the number of classes for the basic core is a fundamental difference. In part-time schools, this quantity decreases throughout high school: 30 classes a week in the first year, 20 classes a week in the second year, and 10 classes a week in the third year. In full-time schools, however, this amount remains almost stable: 29 classes a week in the first and second years and 31 classes a week in the third year. Although the pedagogical aspect of the PEI program is not the focus of this work, it is essential to clarify it since the program presents a new proposal for high schools. Implementing it in practice can be a paradigm shift, especially for education professionals.

Concerning the structural differences between the two models, the work team structure is an interesting point. In part-time schools, there is a higher turnover of teachers, who often teach in different schools to complete their workload, considering the low salaries of the category. This

¹⁸ <<https://www.educacao.sp.gov.br/pei/>>

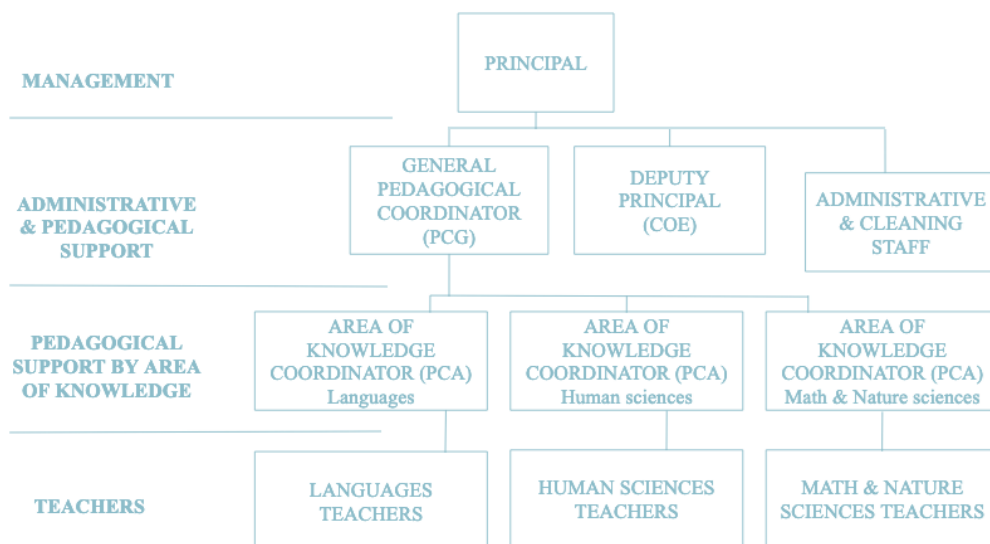
¹⁹ The *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC) (National Curricular Standard) is a normative document that defines the organic and progressive set of essential learning that all students must develop throughout the stages and modalities of basic education in Brazil. As defined in the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* (LDB, Law nº 9.394/1996), the BNCC must guide the curricula of the education systems of the Federative Units, as well as the pedagogical proposals of all public and private schools in early childhood, elementary and secondary education all over Brazil. Source: Ministry of Education, free translation. <<http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br/>>

²⁰ São Paulo State Secretary of Education.

fact hampers pedagogical teamwork and, consequently, the work of school principals. Differently, in full-time schools, teachers are attached exclusively to a single school, with a workload of eight hours a day and forty hours a week²¹. It is also important to mention that school principals have more influence in teachers' selection and dismissal process in this model, being able to select profiles that are more aligned with the program's proposal.

The school units of the PEI Program have a school principal, a deputy school principal (COE), a general pedagogical coordinator (PCG), three pedagogical coordinators of the knowledge areas (PCA) (languages, mathematics and nature sciences, and human sciences), a reading classroom teacher, and disciplines teachers (Figure 4). The school's management team is mainly the school principals and the deputy principals, with the support of the general pedagogical coordinator (PCG).

Figure 4. Organization chart of PEI schools in the State of São Paulo



Source: Elaborated by Campos Cardoso (2023). Adapted from the Human Resources Tutorial *Programa Ensino Integral*, SEDUC-SP. Free translation.

3.4 The fieldwork sample

In this research, fieldwork was done in four public schools implementing the PEI Program. This choice is related to the aim to analyze the practice of school principals in a context of change,

²¹ <<https://www.educacao.sp.gov.br/a2sitebox/arquivos/documentos/344.pdf>>

in this case, a new educational policy. In this way, it can be possible to observe the work of these professionals as public officials and possible tensions and challenges regarding the educational system and the school community.

The selected schools are the responsibility of the São Paulo State and are located in the municipality of Franca. Nowadays, this municipality has 18 state schools in the PEI Program. The criteria used for the selection of schools was to have a diverse group according to the following variables: the geographic location (central and peripheral areas), socioeconomic aspects (socioeconomic condition according to the INSE index²²), size (number of students), and the academic results of students according to IDEB²³ (Table 4). Before inviting the schools to participate in the study, it was presented to the Regional Department of Education of Franca, which approved its realization. Table 5 presents the profile of the research participants.

The names of schools and professionals have been changed for data anonymization purposes. Therefore, the names of the schools were replaced by the letters A, B, C, and D. The names of the professionals were replaced by function + letter referring to the school where they work. This nomenclature will be used throughout the whole dissertation.

Table 4. Selected schools for the fieldwork

Name	Neighborhood	INSE	N. of students	Score IDEB (2019)	Part of the PEI Program
School A	Central	5 (medium-high)	451	5.9 (elementary II) 5.2 (high school)	8 years
School B	Periphery	4 (medium-low)	267	5 (elementary II) 3.6 (high school)	3 years
School C	Central	5 (medium-high)	286	5 (elementary II)	3 years
School D	Periphery	4 (medium-low)	652	4.9 (elementary II) 4.1 (high school)	3 years

Source: Elaborated by Campos Cardoso (2023); primary source: Qedu.

²² The Index of Socioeconomic Level of Basic Education Schools (INSE) is calculated by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), based on questions to students about their family income, ownership of goods and hiring services by their families, in addition to the education level of their guardians. The databases for the construction of INSE are the microdata of the contextual questionnaires to the participants of Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB) and of the National Exam of Secondary Education (ENEM).

²³ Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (IDEB) (Index of Basic Education Development). The IDEB is an indicator that combines the results of two concepts: school flow and assessment performance averages. It is calculated from school approval data (School Census) and performance averages (SAEB).

<<https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/pesquisas-estatisticas-e-indicadores/ideb>>

It is interesting to point out the interviewees' form of entry in the function. Among the school principals, three participated in public tenders and one was designated. Regarding the deputy principals, three were invited by the school principals to the function and one participated in a selection process for the position. According to the School Census data, in state systems, most school principals (31.9%) are chosen exclusively through an electoral process with the school community's participation (employees, teachers, students, and families)²⁴. In municipal systems, 66.6% of school principals occupy positions exclusively by the municipal government designation²⁵. The means of selection by public tender or qualified selection process are the least used by public education systems.

In the next chapter, we will present the analysis of the data produced in the interview and observation situations. The entry of school principals into the role, their motivations, and their difficulties will be discussed. In addition, we will address their actual work, including their work organization, division of duties, main demands, and prioritization, supporting networks, as well as working style.

²⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP). *Censo Escolar 2022* (School Census). <<https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/pesquisas-estatisticas-e-indicadores/censo-escolar/resultados/2022>>

²⁵ Idem.

Table 5. Profile of interviewees

Biographic Data	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Principal D	Deputy Principal A	Deputy Principal B	Deputy Principal C	Deputy Principal D1	Deputy Principal D2
Gender	Feminin	Feminin	Feminin	Feminin	Feminin	Feminin	Feminin	Masculin	Feminin
Age	53	43	41	40	51	46	36	38	41
Color / Race ²⁶	White	White	White	Brown	White	White	Brown	White	White
Academic Background	Pedagogy and social sciences	Mathematics and pedagogy	Pedagogy	Letters and pedagogy	Pedagogy	Physical education and pedagogy	Physical education	Mathematics	Mathematics and pedagogy
Prior occupations	Primary Teacher	Math Teacher; Pedagogical Coordinator; and Deputy Principal	Primary Teacher	Portuguese Teacher; Vice Principal; Director of Pedagogical Sector (Regional Department of Education of Franca)	Primary Teacher	Physical Education Teacher	Physical Education Teacher; Pedagogical Coordinator for Physical Education (Regional Department of Education of Franca); Pedagogical Coordinator	Math and Physics Teacher	Math Teacher; Pedagogical Coordinator (Regional Department of Education of São Paulo); Pedagogical Coordinator
Period in the function (Principal or Deputy Principal)	20 years (Principal)	6 years (Principal) 10 years (Deputy Principal)	5 years (Principal)	5 years (Principal) 5 years (Deputy Principal)	10 years (Deputy Principal)	3 years (Deputy Principal)	2 years (Deputy Principal)	4 years (Deputy Principal)	6 months (Deputy Principal)

²⁶ This dissertation borrows the concept of color or race used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), responsible for the census of the Brazilian population. The IBGE research is based on self-declaration and has five categories: 'branco' (white), 'preto' (black), 'pardo' (brown), 'indígena' (indigenous), and 'amarelo' (yellow). The translation was done literally since there is no direct translation of each of the categories to English.

4. Chapter 3 - The work of school principals in Brazil

As discussed in Chapter 1, at a first moment, we will be interested in analyzing the work of school principals with a focus on the activity, a recent approach in the sociology of work (Gather Thurler & et al., 2017). The interest in their actual work arose from professional experiences in which it was possible to observe how the engagement of these professionals in their workspaces influenced the school climate and results. In the challenge of offering a universal and quality education for all, school principals have the important mission to organize the educational work so that each student finds significant opportunities for their own development in school. Thus, these professionals are critical to the educational process in seeking quality and relevant education, especially in public education systems.

Many initial questions came to mind from the acknowledgment of the importance of school principals' role. It was intriguing to comprehend the current room for maneuvering school principals have to adapt schools into meaningful places for students, the primary competencies needed to carry out this function, and how to support it with relevant continuing training. Although these questions are still exciting and important to pursue, it was essential to step back and start the investigation by understanding what this work is about in reality.

As we have seen before, the literature indicates that in Brazil, there are few studies centered on the school principal and using empirical methodologies to describe the actual work performed by these professionals (Oliveira & Vasquez-Menezes, 2018; Simielli, 2022). The research of Parente (2017) analyzing the work of school principals in municipal schools allows us to establish some parallels, even if our sample is from state public schools. Moreover, we also consider as a reference the research carried out by Barrère (2006), Gather Thurler & et al. (2017), and Progin (2017) to elucidate the work routine of school principals in France and Switzerland. Indeed, the realities analyzed are considerably different; however, as we will see, these professionals' work routine have significant similarities.

Then, this chapter intends to address the following questions: What does the work of school principals in Brazilian public schools consist of? How is this work done? What types of demands do principals have? How do they prioritize them? How do they organize their work and the work

of the school's employees? Thus, as a starting point, we seek to understand the demands, activities, tasks, as they are performed on a daily basis. For this, the data produced in the interviews and observation *in loco* will be used, in an intentionally and predominantly descriptive analysis, to disclose the actual work of school principals in Brazil.

4.1 Starting to work as a school principal

I think the beginning was more difficult. Especially because I was young, a woman, and new in the function. I think women have an enormous challenge to show authority, right? I had parents who only respected me in the presence of a male employee. (Principal C, Min. 37:58)

The school principals interviewed in this research are primarily teachers, as also indicated by other studies (Oliveira & et al., 2017; Parente, 2017). Starting to work in school management, assuming a new role, is a significant professional change in their trajectory. In Brazil, there does not exist a specific career path to become a school principal from initial formation. In general, it is possible to observe an ascending career from teacher to pedagogical coordinator, deputy principal, principal, technical advisor in the Regional Departments of Education, and eventually, the work in the Secretariat of Education²⁷. However, this path is not linear, nor does every teacher pursue it. For this reason, we were initially interested in understanding the motivations of these professionals for engaging in school management and their initial difficulties.

At some point in their career as teachers, all interviewees left the classroom to integrate into the management team as pedagogical coordinators, deputy principals, or school principals. When analyzing their motivations to do so, some common points draw attention. The professionals expressed a strong engagement in their educational practice, an inner motivation to make a positive

²⁷ In the State of São Paulo, as an example, according to Complementary Law No. 1,374 of March 30, 2022, to be a school principal, it is mandatory to be a teacher in the state education system, hold a full degree in an area of teaching ("Licenciatura plena"), have at least three years of experience in teaching, and knowledge of school management. <<https://www.al.sp.gov.br/repositorio/legislacao/lei.complementar/2022/original-lei.complementar-1374-30.03.2022.html>>

difference in their workspace, and a constant search for new challenges. These were the main motivations identified in the speeches for acting as principals or deputy principals. In addition, the stability of the position is also mentioned, in the case of the function's entry by public tender, and the fact of being inspired by principals at schools where they worked.

Regarding the engagement in their educational practice, it is interesting to note the extra involvement of these professionals in their work environments while still acting as teachers. The interviewees report always being involved with projects beyond their classrooms, either with students or school administration. In this way, it is possible to notice a common point in the profile of school principals and deputy principals: professionals who, as teachers, assumed functions by their own initiative beyond what was expected or mandatory for them. The statements below illustrate this observation.

I have always been that teacher who was very engaged in projects. I have always been like: I cannot just criticize, so what can I do to improve that? I have always liked that, and I was always very involved; the student union was always under my supervision, also the sports activities. You end up having more contact with the students. Thus, my vision within management is to do it for the students, for someone. (Deputy Principal B, Min. 02:03)

I had a very nice partnership with the current principal at the school where I was a teacher. Moreover, I was always engaged in the school's administrative process. Always as a collaborator, a teacher, but a collaborator. And then, I decided that if I was in management, I could collaborate in another way. So that is when I choose to work in school management. (Deputy Principal A, Min. 02:20)

This extra engagement aligns with another common characteristic observed in the speeches: the desire to make a positive difference in their work environments. Some school principals, for example, reported their preference for working in disadvantaged neighborhoods, where the impact of their work can be greater. Others mentioned that, after working for years at a school, they felt motivated to change and to contribute to another institution. Thus, it is possible to perceive a strong desire to positively impact the lives of students and families through their work, as we can see in the statement below.

Being principal in a central school, in a small school, in a community²⁸ where students read, that they have a father, that there is no shortage of food, that the slippers do not break

²⁸In the educational sector in Brazil, the expression "school community" is largely used. This expression refers to the actors that are part of school life (employees, teachers, students, and families) where a particular school is located

to the point that I have to put clips on them all day long, it is very easy! It's the comfort zone. What has made me a principal today? Having come here and having seen so many problems that I needed to be at the forefront, with a team, to be able to make the change. So what is my social role? The role of change. If I'm not here at the front, studying, engaged, thinking, it won't happen. (Principal D, Min. 57:28)

The third aspect concerning the interviewees' motivations to work in school management is the constant search for new challenges. The interviewees sought in school management the opportunity to contribute to the educational process from another perspective, through a broader vision than that of the classroom. The professionals believed in being able to contribute in other ways in the management team and mentioned the motivation to challenge themselves in this new position. The statements below illustrate this observation.

I think that what I had to learn in the classroom, although the classroom, the knowledge, is not limited, it is constant. But what I had to learn there, to give of myself in the classroom, I felt I needed to help more in other matters. (Principal C, Min. 08:23)

It's because, as a teacher, you have a focus on your classroom, on the students right there, on the learning of math. Sometimes that student, his action, his way of being, sometimes even his way of behaving in the classroom, sometimes you do not have the dimension of what is happening to him, like the vision you have in the management position. Again, when you are in the classroom, it is very limited, it is just that. (...) When you are in management, you see the student, but you see where he is coming from, his family situation, the context, and even public policies, which sometimes could be much more structured. (...) And today, in management, the perspective is different; it is completely different. (Deputy Principal DI, Min. 03:04)

The motivations frequently mentioned for entering the field of school management are interesting for us to learn more about the profile of professionals who pursue this career. From the speeches, it is possible to notice among the interviewees, from their work as teachers, an extra engagement that goes outside the reach of their initial functions, whether by taking on projects beyond the classroom or collaborating spontaneously with the school administration. There is a tendency to seek new challenges, to leave their comfort zone, and to expand their work's impact.

However, although principals have significant motivations to move from the classroom to management, they mention that beginning the new role is very difficult. The main challenges

(neighborhood). Therefore, in this research, "school community" can be understood as the actors participating in a particular school life in a given location.

pointed by the interviewees are the differences between managing a classroom and managing the whole school, building a supporting network, and aspects of gender and age.

The difference of perspective, from micro to macro, is one of the first difficulties of changing roles, according to the principals. When acting as teachers, the focus is on the classroom, students, and their learning, which is already a considerable challenge. When acting in management, the area of action expands, and the professionals must deal with other actors, such as families, employees, and suppliers, in addition to developing a broader vision of everything that happens at the school. As stated by Principal D,

Then for a year, it was very tough because you arrive in the classroom, you teach, and you control the problems in your classroom. You arrive at the school, from one classroom, I moved to eight; it's not just eight students, it's eight classrooms with students, plus the teachers, and the other staff. (Min. 53:05)

If this transition is already challenging, going through it without a supporting network is another difficulty mentioned by the principals. In one of the cases, for example, the principal states that when she first took over as deputy principal, she could not count on the support of the pedagogical coordinator at the time, since this professional resented not being considered for the position. According to the principal, she could not access the information and knowledge the pedagogical coordinator already had about the school. Besides that, counting on the support of teachers can also be a struggle at the beginning, as mentioned by Principal C,

Because when I arrived, I felt that the teachers wanted a change, that they were not satisfied with the school as it was, with how it was being managed. However, although they wanted a change, I felt little support; very few teachers supported me. (Min. 14:02)

Finally, gender and age were also presented as obstacles at the beginning of their careers as managers, in the case of women principals who assumed this position relatively early. In addition, due to their previous roles, for example, as a primary school teacher, they were often told that they did not have the profile for this function or could not perform it. The following statements demonstrate this point.

The challenge of coming to school C, I heard this a lot from people, "you have worked your whole life as a cycle I teacher, and you are coming to a school of older students; you do not have the profile". I have often heard, "You do not look like a principal, you are too young, you will not be able to handle it". (Principal C, 12:25)

Then I became deputy principal. But I was very young, how old was I? 30 years! The teachers were 40, 50 years old. So some loved it, because they knew me, “Look how cool, she is like this, like that, it’s going to work really well”. And others do not. “How come this girl, this kid, is going to order me around?” There is always this question of patriarchy, who gives or not the orders. (Principal D, Min. 51:54)

Therefore, entering a new function is challenging for any professional, and school principals are no exception. Progin (2017) mention that “(...) many of them [the principals] referred to this entry into the function as a tsunami, according to the expression of the directors, whose wave, invisible at first, violently arose” (p. 97, free translation). In analyzing their daily work, we will observe to what extent these initial motivations supported their practice and how the school principals overcame these initial difficulties. After getting to know their profile better, we will analyze the way of working that they developed throughout their career in school management.

4.2 The work from the school principals’ perspective

4.2.1 Division of duties, main demands and supporting networks

The demands arrive, but we must also look at our own reality. Because sometimes, as a school on the periphery, we cannot work like a central school, so within those demands, we must have that distinctive vision, mainly for mediation. (Deputy Principal DII, Min. 01:02:58)

It is essential to emphasize at this point that the participants in this study work within a specific model of school organization, the PEI Program, as described in Chapter 2. In this program, the organization chart of employees ([Figure 4](#)) and their expected roles are already defined. For this reason, when asked about their attributions, the professionals’ reports are very similar, since the functions proposed by the program frame them all. It is possible to find in [Annex IV](#) the description of principals and deputy principals’ duties within the program. That way, when asked about the division of work among the management team, the interviewees mentioned the following structure. Table 6 represents the division of duties from the professionals’ perspective: they list the work they must execute in their own words.

Table 6. Division of duties between principals and deputy principals in PEI schools in São Paulo State

Actor	Activity	Explanation / Example	Receives support from
Principal	Administrative work	Ex: Documents to the Regional Department of Education; School Action Plan; Accountability; Suppliers; Work schedule;	Administrative staff (School Secretariat)
	Financial management	Distribution of school financial resources; Purchases;	Parents and Teachers Association (APM ²⁹); School Council ³⁰
	Class leaders	Class leaders are students responsible for being the interlocutors between their peers and the principal	Students
	Youth Clubs	Youth clubs are one of the actions of the PEI Program. These are clubs whose themes are proposed by the students themselves, who develop projects throughout the school year. Youth clubs are self-managed by students with guidance from the school principal. The principal also trains teachers regarding this subject.	Students
	Assignment and substitution of classes	Distribution of classes workload among teachers and reorganization in the absence of teachers	Administrative staff and PCG
	Weekly meetings	With PCG (follow-up the pedagogical work of the school); with the Deputy Principal (Organization of management work);	PCG Deputy Principal
	Management of supporting staff work	Administrative (school secretariat), cooking (kitchen) and cleaning staff	Deputy Principal

²⁹The Parents and Teachers Association (APM) is an entity whose purpose is to be an instrument of community participation in the school. It aims to collaborate with the school principal to achieve the educational goals; represent the community's aspirations; mobilize resources from the community to help the school; among others. It comprises nine members with and without voting rights at the school's General Assemblies. Members with voting rights are public employees working at the school, legal guardians for enrolled students, and students over 18. Non-voting members are students under 18 enrolled at the school, former students and their legal guardians, former school teachers, and other members of the community. Source: Decree nº 65.298, 18/11/2020. Free translation.

³⁰ The School Council, linked to the school management, is a collegiate body that must be elected annually in the first school month with a mandate until the following year. It has consultative, deliberative, supervisory, mobilizing, and pedagogical functions regarding the educational work at the school. The School Council comprises representatives from all segments of the school community. It has a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 40 members, all with voting rights, except the President of the School Council (School Principal). The composition is 40% of teachers; 5% of education specialists (deputy principal, pedagogical coordinator); 5% of employees; 25% of students' legal guardians; 25% of regularly enrolled and frequent students. Source: Resolution SEDUC nº 19, 08/03/2022. Free translation.

	Classes observation	Usually, the pedagogical coordinators (general and knowledge areas) observe teachers' classes to give them feedback. Eventually, the principals also carry out this activity	PCG
Deputy Principal	Welcoming	Welcoming of students and teachers (return from vacation, beginning of the school year, etc). Deputy principals train volunteer students so they can welcome their colleagues and teachers	Volunteer students
	Conflict mediation	Mediation of all conflicts at school with students, teachers, and families	Principal
	Tutoring Program	Tutoring is one of the actions of the PEI Program. At the beginning of the school year, students choose a teacher to be their tutor. During tutoring, they work on three aspects: academic, personal, and professional, in order to develop their life project. Principals and Deputy Principals also have tutors. The Deputy Principal is responsible for training all tutors	Teachers
	Attending the school community	Meetings with families or general assistance to the community (doubts, conflicts, assistance, access to other public services, among others)	Principal
	Active search	Search for students with a high rate of absences; Follow-up the track record of students' absences; Investigate causes; Prevent drop out	Administrative staff

Source: Campos Cardoso (2023), Interviews.

Essentially, in all participating schools, this is the division of duties presented by the interviewees and their general attributions. In this regard, the PEI program provides a rigid structure around work; for example, Youth Clubs and class leaders are the responsibility of the school principal, while the deputy principal oversees tutoring and conflict mediation. The management team cannot change this structure, which all schools follow in the program, as stated by Principal C, (...) *the program is already a ready-made model; it is not under discussion* (Min. 28:38). Regarding what is expected from each professional, she adds, *that is the [competencies] map, a ready, rigid, and not flexible document. It comes ready from the Secretariat of Education* (Min. 53:41). Parente (2017) also observed the rigidity of the administrative structure in municipal schools, not part of the PEI, “the administrative structure of the school is usually imposed by the

central bodies, demonstrating the little interference of the principal in this regard” (p. 263, free translation).

Although each actor’s functions are well defined, sometimes principals and deputies help each other in their daily work. An evident example is conflict mediation, which often has a much greater demand than the deputy principal is able to manage. In these cases, the principal assumes part of the conflicts to be handled. Thus, it is possible to observe that daily work requires some flexibility concerning what the norm prescribes. The following statement illustrates this point.

Deputy Principal A does the mediation of the school. However, the amount [of conflicts] that we have now, post-pandemic, is huge, and she, alone, cannot meet this demand. Then it comes to me, it is not my function within the PEI Program, but I have to support; I have to help put out this fire; otherwise, the work does not move forward. (Principal A, Min. 57:08)

Regarding this mutual support, another point investigated concerns their supporting networks in everyday work. It is essential to understand whom principals rely on most and with whom they effectively work to carry out their tasks. Indeed, depending on the nature of the task, support comes from different and specific actors. For example, when it comes to paper bureaucracy, the administrative staff often supports the principals. Some of the principals even say they delegate part of the bureaucratic work to these professionals so they can focus on the pedagogical aspect of the school.

Regarding their supporting networks, a common point among interviewees is the close working partnership between the principal, deputy principal, and the general pedagogical coordinator, often referred to as “the management trio”. According to Oliveira & Abrucio (2018), the harmony of the management team is fundamental for the school management. Certainly, the primary support mentioned by the principals is their deputies and vice versa. According to them, this support makes all the difference in the smooth running of the work, as we see in the reports below. Here it is essential to mention that the principals choose the deputy principals and general pedagogical coordinators, a fact that can corroborate their good working dynamic.

The principal chooses the COI or deputy principal. So, it is the best possible scenario because they have a profile I’ve always needed for the job. (...) The PCGs as well, the general coordinators, I choose. They are the best, the best profiles according to my management [style]. (Principal D, Min. 42:41 - 42:45)

The deputy principal, who was my deputy principal at Lauro Bonfim [another school], came with me. So, I had extra strength because we always worked in a very close partnership. She has always been a support for me, a person who always enriched my work. And whenever people say that the management position, a school principal, is very lonely, I don't feel lonely because of my deputy principal. It's an extraordinary support in my career. (Principal A, Min. 06:58)

In this partnership situation, Principal A and I, in a little while, people start to confound, who is who? We are one, do you get it? So, the work is not so compartmentalized. This is this, and so on. No. We are a team; we have defined roles, and each one takes care of and is responsible for developing something, but we are one. (Deputy Principal A, Min. 50:54)

And so, I think we have a very good partnership between me and Principal C because we have a very similar profile. So, when she takes a vacation, and I stay, the school is the same. And that is how it is when I take a vacation, and she stays. Of course, we miss each other, right? Because then it is double work, but considering our profile and how we handle situations, we follow the same line. (Deputy Principal C, Min. 01:06:55)

Another interesting point highlighted in the interviews is the support provided by the teachers. In this case, two aspects are worth mentioning. The first has to do with the idea that the PEI Program requires all school employees to be co-responsible for its progress. In this sense, especially the principals mention that teachers are also their supporting networks, at least in theory, as their active participation is an obligation of the program. The second point is something more evident in the speech of deputy principals, the fact that all teachers are tutors for the students is an extra support for their work. In this way, the teacher is the student's first point of contact and helps the deputy principals, for example, to prevent school dropouts.

(...) This support network must happen, regardless of whether you like me or not, because this is a matter of having a vision of belonging to the school. (...) So, if I tell you that a teacher is not a supporting network, he-she is outside the PEI (...) In practice, everyone helps, but some are more mature, more involved, and others less. So, today, the positive vision of the school cannot come only from the principal. If the teacher is in the Program (...) he-she must develop the feeling of belonging, not only because I want to, but because the Program requires it, you know? (Principal C, Min. 01:06:58 - 01:08:31)

(...) Today in the PEI school, what is beneficial is that there is a tutor teacher, a teacher whom the students choose. (...) This was very beneficial because sometimes the students tell such things, such situations to this teacher, who already filters, they are already the first filter before reaching us (...) and we always try to create this bond with the teacher, so that they can filter for us (...). (Deputy Principal DI, Min. 15:15)

On the other hand, some deputy principals report teachers' difficulty in mediating conflicts in their classrooms, which ends up overloading their work as mediators. They point out that teachers quickly send conflicts to the management team without doing the first mediation, which is a classroom management problem according to them. For this reason, their work is trivialized, as very small conflicts, which the teachers themselves could resolve, escalate to the direction. According to them, there is still a strong vision of separation between teaching staff and direction. Teachers still delegate the responsibility for conflicts very soon, as if it were not part of their function but of the management team. The Deputy Principal B explains,

I asked the teacher to report what [the problem] was, why the student was not doing the activity. And then, the student told me he did not know. So, if the teacher had taken the student out of the classroom, "Wait for me over here" (...) and talked privately with the student: "What is going on? Why aren't you doing the activity" (...) Then we would verify that that student's mistake, the "not doing it", is a misunderstanding. (...) Sometimes they say the student does not want to because they are undisciplined, do not pay attention (...) It is not like that; why doesn't he want to? So, it demands wear and tear, and sometimes we are not well-liked by the teachers because we return to them. (Min. 07:32)

Finally, we also sought to understand whether the Regional Department of Education (DRE), representing the State Secretariat of Education, was a support point for daily work. In this case, the school principals have more direct and close contact with the body than the deputy principals. In Parente's research (2017), all school principals also mention to have a positive relation with the central body. Interestingly, the deputy principals who have worked in Regional Departments of Education see the body more positively and as an essential support. The others say that despite being a support, the bureaucracy is significant, and for complex situations, they feel helpless.

Deputy Principal DII narrates an interesting case to illustrate this point of view. The Secretary of Education offers psychological support to students through a program called *Psicologia Viva*. Nonetheless, psychologists can only address topics present in a pre-defined script. In a suicide attempt situation, for example, school professionals felt helpless about supporting the student. The solution found by the Deputy Principal was to establish an external partnership with a university so that psychology interns could support to approach the topic with students. The professional reports,

So, sometimes they leave us unassisted in these cases, right? Sometimes on paper, it is one thing (...) When there is a conflict, it depends on the conflict, "Oh, we will send someone; we will recommend you to go, to attend a meeting with a psychologist". This psychologist does not need to be from the State; he can be from anywhere in the country, ok? Online. It is just that you need a psychologist to talk to [the student]; the student is trying to kill himself. Then you tell him [the psychologist], "Look, the student is trying to kill himself". [They answer] "Oh no, I cannot address this subject, I can only address what is in the structured [script]". (...) Then you book, and they do not show up because they do not receive it [the payment]. So, on paper, it is wonderful, but in practice... that is why we have to find another way, you know? We here, the management, together with the support of other people, have to find a way to solve it. (Min. 38:10)

Concerning the work demands, the management team's routine comprises several diverse and often unexpected demands as foreseeable. Although one of the premises of the PEI Program is the use of a weekly agenda, unforeseen circumstances make it challenging to plan activities in daily work thoroughly. The main unforeseen events mentioned by the interviewees are demands from the Regional Department of Education with short deadlines, resolving conflicts, and attending the school community.

When asked about the demands that take more time and energy in their daily work, the answers differ for principals and deputy principals. School principals say it is predominantly conflict resolution and writing records. In addition, principals mention that they have the regular demands part-time school principals have, plus others. For example, they mention being closer to students in full-time schools since they lead actions as the Youth Clubs and class leaders. On the other hand, the deputy principals state that the demands that most require their attention daily are tutoring and conflict mediation. Tutoring is a specific action of the PEI Program. Therefore, the deputy principals are at the forefront of this action for the first time, which may contribute to the fact that it represents a greater demand in their daily work, as they are still learning about it.

We try; we have a weekly agenda. So, in our management team meeting the week before, we already set the weekly agenda, right? What sometimes extrapolates a little are issues of indiscipline or even demands that come to us with a short deadline to be done. (Deputy Principal DII, Min. 43:06)

But, in brief, the feedback from tutoring and school mediation takes up most of my time. Things that happen on a daily basis that I cannot plan. (Deputy Principal C, Min. 49:35)

In front of a routine of many demands and unforeseen circumstances, it is also important to understand how professionals prioritize their daily activities. According to Parente (2017), “principals often need to choose priorities, focusing on the issues they deem essential, as it becomes practically impossible to integrate so many actions that occur concurrently within the scope of school administration” (p. 272, free translation). The answers were categorical: the priorities are always the students and the Regional Department of Education. The interviewees try to follow their planned agendas but prioritize what is urgent and mainly what involves these two audiences. The statements below exemplify this point.

(...) I always leave something undone, every day, and when the students are at school, even more... it is not that I do not do, I prioritize what is necessary; if my deputy principal is having lunch, I am here, and the other deputy has not arrived, do I leave the student bleeding there, or should I make a report? I will help the bleeding student. (Principal D, Min. 35:00)

I always prioritize the student, any situation that involves a student. And the mediation is not simple because you have to listen to all parties, you have to call the father sometimes. So, it takes time. I spend a whole afternoon solving a situation sometimes. (Deputy Principal C, Min. 51:41)

In summary, it is possible to notice that the main work activities are fixed according to the guidelines of the PEI program. The division of duties is standardized in PEI schools. Nevertheless, in everyday school life, many unforeseen events and imbalances lead principals and deputy principals to support each other, often executing demands outside their responsibility. In this sense, everyday reality prevails over prescribed norms. The fact that principals choose the professionals that will work on the school management facilitates the work dynamics, since it can lead to greater support among them. In the following section, how these professionals execute the work will be presented in detail.

4.2.2 Working style: Concrete cases

I say this a lot to them here at school; I do not know everything, right? I cannot handle everything. But that is why I have a team. And if I have a team, it is because we all work together, because my work is not alone; the school does not run alone; it runs by everyone. So, my work focus, what is my keyword as a school principal? Teamwork. If the team works together, coming from the top, supervision, school principal, employees, teachers, and students; if you have this type of work, there is no reason for the work not to go right at the school. (Principal B, Min. 01:02:36)

In general, when interviewing professionals, it is possible to find a difference between what is said and what is performed in practice. Not necessarily as a matter of bad faith. In a comprehensive approach our point of departure is the reliance on our interviewees. However, some elements remain hidden in the execution of an activity, sometimes even for who performs it. For this reason, during the interviews, we often asked the interviewees for examples and concrete cases to exemplify the activity they were talking about. Thus, it is possible to better understand the “how” of the action they claim to perform. This strategy is also complemented by field observation, the subject of the next session.

The elements of their way of working that repeatedly appeared in the interviews are active listening, presence at school, the integrated work of the management team, the legislation mobilization, and the use of the PEI Program instruments. To some extent, all interviewees mentioned these elements when describing their way of carrying out activities, or as we called in this research, their working style.

Starting with active listening, principals and deputy principals report that it is fundamental to their daily work. They also mention that listening is the main strategy used to deal with the challenges of the function. The professionals affirm that they always consult other school employees to carry out their tasks, ensuring they do not make decisions alone. This attitude reaffirms a concern regarding the democratic aspect that is expected of this role in Brazil. For example, Deputy Principal B reports her experience organizing the school’s welcoming, in which she turned to the principal to define the activities to be carried out.

We try to avoid getting into what is up to the other, but we listen a lot. “I’m going to do it like this; what do you think?”. (...) Like the example of welcoming, it is my responsibility, right? However, I like to listen because there is a point that we need to be practical and functional. It is no use for me to come up with 500 things to make it look pretty, decorate it, and at the time, we see that it does not work. So, I share the idea, and we find a consensus. So, we work a lot like this, listening. “Ah, that way, what do you think?”. The critical part. (Deputy Principal B, Min. 29:31)

Another fundamental aspect of how the professionals work as principals is being active in the school, circulating throughout it, and being in contact with all the school actors. All interviewees mention doing what the PEI Program calls “pedagogy of presence”, which means constantly interacting with students at every possible moment, such as the entrance to classes, breaks, and mealtime. This point is one of the most significant differences between principals of past times, the so-called “cabinet principals”, and professionals who assume this role today, as we will see in Chapter 5.

The main thing is that I am here every day at 7 am. So, what is my function? Be present at school at 7 am. So, when I arrive, the students enter, because this is very important. When students realize that there is a principal in the school, it is different. So, if I am here on arrival, I am here on departure. If I have a meeting, or something else, we always have someone there. (Principal B, Min. 01:13:10)

The integrated work of the management team is also a characteristic that appears in the interviews. According to the interviewees, they work closely together, often co-constructing proposals, documents, and solutions. In the statement below, Principal A exemplifies it by presenting a specific document written together by her, the deputy principal, and the pedagogical coordinator, even though only one will sign it. This fact reinforces the narrative of how the management team has a good work dynamic, being the primary support to each other.

When in this school, we talk about management, the principal, all three of us! When we talk about the pedagogical coordinator, all three! When we talk about the deputy principal, the three! We work a lot together, a lot. When signing the paper, this document belongs to the principal. The three did, and I signed. This one is of the coordinator; the three did it, and she signed it, you understand? So, we have this work profile. (Principal A, Min. 58:55)

Another common point is the use of legislation to support daily work. This fact can often be observed in public work, as it brings greater security to public officials concerning their decision-making. Principals often mention that other school actors, such as students and teachers,

often do not have the dimension of how processes should be conducted and what can be done or not. In these moments, legislation is always mobilized to support the decisions taken by the management team. Principal C, for example, mentions that there was a demand at the school to buy butter to spread on bread for lunch. However, according to her, what appears to be easy to solve is more complex. As a manager, she must follow the menu prepared by the nutritionist of the Secretariat of Education, as any change in the students' diet is her responsibility. Then, she says that she can officially request the Secretariat but cannot spontaneously buy the butter to meet this demand. Other principals reiterate this;

And I always tell them we must work according to the legislation. To what is written. Is it written in the legislation? Is it written in the resolution? So, this is how we are going to act. Is it not? There is no guessing, I do not guess anything. What is there is what we must do. (Principal B, Min. 01:06:02)

As principals we find strategies to work on what we can, what is up to me. But what is not up to me at all, then I do not even listen. Then, it is like... there is no way. It is laid down in legislation; we work a lot with legislation. What is laid down? That is it? What can we do better from it? So, we do it. I do not waste my time thinking about what I will not be able to change, you know? I focus on what will bring results, what needs me. (Principal D, Min. 26:52)

Finally, the principals' adherence to the PEI Program, as we will see in Chapter 4, also influences their use of its instruments. Not only do they mention the use of various tools the program proposes in their daily work: the PDCA cycle³¹, the 5W2H³², the map of competencies³³, among others. They also adopt the program's premises in their practice, including with the students. Principal B mentions a fun fact: Everyone affirms that students talk precisely like her. According to her, this happens because she regularly uses the program's vocabulary and tools with

³¹The PDCA cycle is a continuous loop of planning (P), doing (D), checking (C), and acting (A). It provides an approach for solving problems and managing change.

<<https://www.mindtools.com/as215i1/pdca-plan-do-check-act>>

³²5W2H is a tool that provides guiding questions when assessing a process or problem. The five W's-who, what, when, where, and why, and the two H's-how and how much, force you to consider various facets of the situation being analyzed.

<<https://digital.ahrq.gov/health-it-tools-and-resources/evaluation-resources/workflow-assessment-health-it-toolkit/all-workflow-tools/5w2h>>

³³The map of competencies is used to evaluate all professionals in the performance of their attributions and in developing the competencies foreseen for the Regime of Full and Integral Dedication. For each competency, macro-indicators define the expected behavior within the scope of the competency. Then, micro-indicators detail this behavior for each role in the model. Source: *Tutorial de Recursos Humanos, Programa Ensino Integral* (2014), SEDUC-SP.

students so they can appropriate what the program proposes and means. When conducting a meeting with the Youth Club of Gastronomy, for example, she explains that what they planned did not materialize. When preparing a fruit salad, some students did not bring the fruit they were responsible for. She led the group to reflection based on the PDCA cycle and the “focus on the solution”, another principle of PEI. She states,

They must learn to plan, execute, evaluate, and follow the route. (...) I use a lot of the words of the program with them. (...) So, I focus on the program; I work a lot on the principles and bases within the program. So, they have to know why they are here, why is the school full time? (...) I told them, “Focus on the solution”. What is your solution? Some brought it, some did not. You are the manager of your club. What are you going to do? You cannot abandon it. You cannot abandon the ship. You have to do something because the club is there. (...) So we have to get them to reflect. (...) Then she said [the student], “Ah, so we do the following: we do with what we have and reduce the amount for each one”. I said, “Focus on the solution!”. (...) So, I work on that reflective side with them. (Principal B, Min. 36:47)

Although it is not the focus of this research, it is important to briefly mention the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the work of school principals. They mention how much they had to work beyond their duties during this period so as not to lose students, such as taking and picking up activities at students’ homes or talking to them or their families on the phone, even late at night. In addition, the return of the pandemic generated an overload of work concerning the mediation of conflicts and socio-emotional issues. Many students had difficulties readapting to social contact in schools. Finally, the impact on learning was tragic. The principals claim the school deficit worsened, bringing more challenges to their daily work. Principal A reports a case:

Then the pandemic arrived, right? (...) It strangled everyone, and it was no different for us. However, we did not have dropouts. We managed to keep in touch with this community of students and parents. It is much work. Much work. Even at home sometimes. And looking for students. And the tutors close to them. How many times Deputy Principal A and I went to these students’ houses to bring them activities, to pick activities up because they did not have the emotional condition to come, right? They did not want to come. That simple. Not because it was far away... no! Because they really did not want to. We arrived at the house of a student who was locked in the bathroom and did not want to talk to us. And we insisted and asked the mother for permission to go to the bathroom door and take this boy out. And there we did it. (Principal A, Min. 18:42)

Therefore, it is possible to observe that the work profile of the principals and deputy principals interviewed are very similar. The professionals are present in the school day to day and carry out their tasks by listening to the other actors and following the current legislation. Furthermore, the management team works a lot together, even though each has specific functions or its own “square”, as they say in the PEI Program. The following section will present how this work was observed in practice.

4.3 The work observed in the field: The school principals’ working day

To complement the interviews, observations *in loco* of school principals’ working hours were carried out for a whole day. In total, there were four days of observation, each following the routine of a school principal. The objective of the observation was to notice how the work reported by the professionals occurs in practice. It is essential to mention that we carried out unstructured observations, with notes taking. Due to time constraints, the follow-up of school principals was prioritized. Nevertheless, in times of absence, we also accompany the deputy principals. Except for school A, all observations occurred on different days from the interviews. For this reason, only at this school, the first activity of the day was the interview with the researcher. Below, it is possible to find the systematization of the observations’ data according to five aspects: the time period (time slot observed), the actor (principal or deputy principal), the activity (task realized), the place (where the activity is carried out), and the support (with whom the actor works to accomplish the task).

Table 7. Systematization of school principals' working hours, February 2023**1) School Principal A.**

Time Period	Actor	Activity	Place	Support	Notes
7:54 - 8:06	Principal	Interview between Principal and researcher	Principal's office	-	-
8:15 - 9:30	Researcher	Waiting period in the Administration Office	School's Secretariat	-	-
9:30 - 10:36	Deputy Principal	Interview between Deputy Principal and researcher	Principal's office	-	-
10:37 - 10:44	Deputy Principal	Dialogue with agent regarding a student with bulimia	Corridor	Agent	The student was waiting outside the room
10:45 - 11:20	Principal	Computer work: Fill the Secretariat of Education's platform with information regarding the curriculum	School's Secretariat	Secretary I	During this activity, the principal was interrupted regarding the following issues: Absence of school agent (employee); Problem in the students' toilet; Student's mother who wanted updated info about student
11:21 - 11:30	Principal	Computer work: Orientation document to teachers	Principal's office	Deputy Principal	Principal wrote the document and Deputy Principal revised
11:31	Principal	Go to Regional Department of Education to solve a problem regarding an absent teacher	State Department	Secretary I	The Department answered the question by email, but it was inconclusive for the Principal to take action
Lunch break					
14:00 - 14:30	Principal	Work with the Pedagogical Coordinator	School's Secretariat	Pedagogical Coordinator	-
14:31 - 16:00	Principal	Meeting with teachers regarding a case of racism in the school (Orientations)	Meeting room	Deputy Principal	Principal and Deputy Principal shared the meeting's conduction
16:01	Principal	Computer work:	Principal's	Pedagogical	Co-writing

		Writing of a memorandum regarding the absent teacher addressed to Regional Department of Education	office	Coordinator	
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2) School Principal B

Time Period	Actor	Activity	Place	Support	Notes
7:00 - 7:10	Principal	“Pedagogy of presence”: welcome students in their entrance	Courtyard	-	Deputy Principal and teachers also present
7:15 - 8:10	Principal	Walking tour in the school and stop by each classroom	Whole school	-	-
8:11 - 8:45	Principal	Computer work: Writing the School’s Action Plan	Principal’s office	Deputy Principal	The Deputy Principal leave to solve a problem regarding a student with kidney stones
8:46 - 9:00	Principal	“Pedagogy of presence”: follow students’ break Give students hand sanitizer in the line	Courtyard	School agent	Students come to say hello / talk to Principal
9:01 - 10:29	Principal	Organization of “Youth Clubs” Orientation to clubs’ leaders on the dynamics of the presentation and clubs’ presentation in each classroom	Courtyard and classrooms	-	-
10:30 - 11:00	Principal	Motivational speech to high school students (1st and 2nd years)	Classrooms	-	Principal asks the researcher to talk a bit about her own story to motivate students
11:01 - 11:15	Principal	Computer work: Digitalization of “Youth clubs” proposals	Principal’s office	-	-
11:16 - 11:44	Principal	“Pedagogy of presence”: follow students’ lunch break	Courtyard	School agent	Students come to say hello / talk to Principal
11:45 - 12:45	Principal	Run the enrollment process in the “Youth Clubs”	Classrooms	-	-
Lunch break					
14:00 - 14:30	Deputy Principal	Online meeting: Closing meeting of <i>Psicologia Viva</i> . Program with school psychologist	Deputy Principal’s Office	-	-

14:30 - 14:45	Principal	Computer work: Continuation of writing the School's Action Plan	Principal's office	-	The Deputy Principal is also on computer work, digitizing students' dreams
14:46 - 15:00	Principal	Attendance to student	Principal's office	-	-
15:01 - 15:35	Principal	Computer work: Continuation of writing the School's Action Plan	Principal's office	-	The Principal also works on changing the school calendar due to a communication of the Regional Department of Education about holidays
15:36 - 15:40	Principal	Attendance to teacher	Principal's office	-	-
15:41 - 16:00	Principal	Attendance to administrative employees	School's Secretariat	-	-
16:01 - 16:30	Principal	Solve problem regarding students' toilets (infrastructure + behavior of students)	Students' toilet	Deputy Principal and Pedagogical Coordinator	The Principal calls the maintenance service to solve the problem

3) School Principal C

Time Period	Actor	Activity	Place	Support	Notes
7:00 - 7:30	Principal	Welcoming School assembly Farewell of teachers	Courtyard	Deputy Principal	The assembly was about the student union
7:31 - 7:50	Principal	Discussion with Deputy Principal about student's case	Courtyard	Deputy Principal	-
7:51 - 8:45	Principal	Discussions with Deputy Principal about several topics Contact Regional Department of Education regarding absence of teachers	School's Secretariat	Deputy Principal	Topics: class leaders' uniform; tutoring of students; case of student's contempt to teacher; cases of students' conflicts
8:46 - 13:00	Principal	Meeting with Regional Department of Education Supervisor regarding school's indicators (SARESP results)	Meeting room	Pedagogical Coordinator and Deputy Principal	Discussions about the progress of the school; challenges; results of the State's standard test (academic performance) The pedagogical coordinator led the meeting

					The Deputy left earlier
Lunch break					
14:00 - 14:15	Principal	Attendance to teacher	Classroom	-	Teacher was afraid about asking for an absence a couple of months ahead
14:16 - 14:20	Principal	Discussion with Deputy Principal about student's mother	Principal's office	-	-
14:21 - 15:00	Principal	Discussion with teacher disrespected by student	Principal's office	Deputy Principal	-
15:01 - 15:30	Principal	Phone and computer work	School's Secretariat	Deputy Principal	-
15:31 - 15:35	Principal	Break	School's Secretariat	-	-
15:35 - 15:45	Principal	Attendance to students	School's Secretariat	-	-
15:46 - 16:00	Principal	Break	School's Secretariat	-	-
16:00 - 17:00	Deputy Principal	Mediation meeting With teacher, student, and mother regarding contempt case	Principal's office	Principal Pedagogical Coordinator	Meeting led by the Deputy with assistance of the Pedagogical Coordinator The principal participated in the beginning and left earlier

4) School Principal D

Time Period	Actor	Activity	Place	Support	Notes
9:00 - 9:50	Principal	"Pedagogy of presence": follow students' break	Courtyard and classrooms	School agent Deputy Principal	Principal helps to organize the lines and the return to classrooms Students come to say hello / talk to Principal
9:51 - 10:00	Principal	Computer work: Check emails	Principal's office	-	-
10:01 - 10:20	Principal	Discussion regarding teacher's schedule and writing a demand to the Regional Department of Education	School's Secretariat	Secretary	-

10:21 - 10:30	Principal	Attendance to a student	Principal's office	-	Student had a problem with other students and was crying. The Principal listens to her version of facts
10:31 - 11:00	Principal	Attendance to a group of students related to the previous case	Principal's office	-	The principal listens to the other students' version of the facts Principal stops the attendance to: 1. Talk to another student's mother (indiscipline case); 2. Talk to another student who was expelled from the classroom
11:01 - 11:15	Principal	Attendance to student who was expelled from the classroom	Principal's office	-	The attendance is interrupted by Pedagogical Coordinator regarding list of materials
11:16 - 12:00	Principal	"Pedagogy of presence": follow students' lunch break	Courtyard	School agents	Students come to say hello / talk to Principal
Lunch break					
13:30 - 14:30	Deputy Principals I and II	Meeting with teachers regarding students' dreams and elective courses	Classroom	Principal	Feedback of diagnostic and brainstorming
14:35 - 14:45	Principal	Attendance to supplier (cleaning products)	Principal's office	-	Negotiation according to school's budget
14:46 - 14:50	Principal	Discussion with cleaning agents	Warehouse	-	-
14:51 - 15:20	Principal	Discussion with Deputy Principals regarding the organization of elective courses	Deputy Principals' Office	Deputy Principals I and II	Alignment before talking to the coordinator and teachers
15:21 - 15:30	Principal	Discussion with Pedagogical Coordinator regarding the schedule of elective courses	Deputy Principals' Office	Deputy Principals I and II	Alignment before talking to teachers
15:31 - 15:40	Principal	Discussion with two teachers regarding the elective courses	Deputy Principals' Office and Teachers Room	Deputy Principals I and II	-
15:41 - 15:50	Principal	Discussion with Deputy	Deputy	Deputy	-

		Principals regarding administrative issues	Principals' Office	Principals I and II	
15:51 - 16:00	Principal	Discussion with high school teachers regarding elective courses	Teachers Room	-	-
16:01 - 16:30	Principal	Discussion with Deputy Principals about several issues	Deputy Principals' Office	Deputy Principals I and II	-

Source: Campos Cardoso (2023).

Generally, the principals interacted with all the school actors during their workday, as reported during the interviews. The exception was Principal A, who, at least on the observed day, did not interact with students and worked only from her office and the school secretariat. Concerning working hours, some principals arrived after the school opening hours, but all stayed beyond the standard hours at the end of the day. At that moment, they worked on what was not possible to do during the presence of students and teachers at school due to interruptions. In general, principals work with school agents, deputy principals, and pedagogical coordinators. In this matter, the exception was Principal D, who, on the observed day, had only the deputy principals as support for the execution of her activities.

Thus, some interesting findings can be pointed out from the observation, such as, for example, the fact that the principals' work routines count with frequent interruptions, which was also observed in other studies (Parente, 2017; Garther Thurler & et al., 2017). It is challenging to have the necessary focus for activities that require greater concentration, such as writing documents. An example is Principal B's workday. The data demonstrates that she starts writing the School's Action Plan early in the morning and continues it in the afternoon. However, she is interrupted by students, teachers, and staff whom she has to attend to. It is possible to note that the work in an organization such as a school has a considerable relational aspect and requires many interpersonal skills. When dealing with individuals, especially in formation such as children and teenagers, conflicts are very present and require significant attention from professionals. The principals are constantly required to solve situations and mediate these relations.

Another finding that aligns with what was reported in the interviews is the close work between principals and deputy principals. Indeed, deputy principals are the primary support for principals in carrying out their daily tasks and vice versa. An example is a mediation situation at

School C. A student aggressively disrespected a teacher. The Principal and Deputy discussed the case to align approaches since the mother would come to participate in the mediation at the end of the day. Although it is a function of the Deputy Principal, as it was a delicate case, the Principal offered support to reflect on the situation and participated in the beginning of the mediation session, in which the deputy principal, the pedagogical coordinator, the teacher, the mother, the student, and the researcher were present, this last one as an observer. The Deputy Principal led the process during the session, according to what she had previously discussed with the Principal. The co-responsibility and joint decision may bring greater security to the professionals' practice.

Finally, another point noted is that the principals circulated around the school throughout the working day, except for Principal A. It was interesting to note that when doing so, many students came to greet or talk to the principals, who seemed to be a well-known and close figure to the students. There was no interaction barrier between them. An example is Principal D, who went around the entire school and was present with the students during break times. It was possible to observe that she is accessible to both students and employees.

Therefore, the observation *in loco* allowed us to confirm many points reported by the principals in the interview situation. The unpredictable routine, with many interruptions; the presence in school spaces; and the support of the deputy principals were observed in the follow-up of their workday. Indeed, what is planned is not entirely realized since the actual workday involves many unpredictable events. In this sense, the daily work of school principals is a box of surprises. The professionals must simultaneously deal with many different demands and be available to mediate human relations in the school environment. If we can use a metaphor, it is the work of a maestro, juggler, and tightrope walker all at once.

4.4 Discussion

When analyzing the entry of school principals into this function, it was interesting to observe their motivations. Progin (2017), in her analysis of school principals at primary schools in Geneva, states that these professionals must mobilize a "subjective investment" by the teaching staff for the schoolwork. What we were able to analyze about the practice of school principals in

Brazil is that they also have an extra engagement themselves in their professional trajectories, and since they were teachers. This profile can also explain their commitment to a program such as the PEI, as we will further explore in the following Chapter. As state by Progin (2017),

(...) becoming a principal most often corresponds to a voluntary professional retraining of teachers or trainers from different educational sectors brought to experience ‘an upward personal mobility within a school and a changing public service’ (Barrère, 2006b, p. 12) (...) Many principals are, in fact, former teachers who wish to extend their involvement within the school organization. (p. 35, free translation)

As all school principals were teachers previously, entering this new role is challenging. There is a transition from managing a classroom to an entire school, with an expanded perspective of how the school works. In addition, school principals begin to perform new functions for which they were not necessarily trained, such as financial and people management, the redaction of reports and demands to the Regional Department of Education, among others. In this way, the nature of their work changes profoundly, and principals need to exercise new professional competencies. This fact was also observed by Progin (2017), the author states that,

In primary education in Geneva, the new principals could no longer be considered teachers. They were no longer teaching, and the tasks they had to perform daily were considerably different from those they previously performed: administrative management, human resources management, coordination and management of the team, work with partners outside the establishment, etc. Thus, they had to develop - and for their whole professional activity - skills that they probably did not, for the most part, have needed during their years spent in the classroom, or not to the same extent. Their work routine was totally different from what they had known until then. It is indeed an entry into a new profession, even if this profession is under construction. (p. 30, free translation)

Concerning the day-to-day work, the work routine of school principals, as expected, is full of diverse demands and interruptions. A particular characteristic is that the division of duties within the management team is fixed based on the guidelines of the PEI program. However, in their daily work, professionals end up helping each other in their specific functions, according to the school's

demands. An explicit example is the mediation of conflicts, which takes up a considerable part of school management time. Principals often stay longer than their working hours because, in the absence of students and teachers in the school, they can carry out tasks that require greater concentration, such as writing documents. These characteristics were also observed by Gather Thurler & et al. (2017) in research conducted in Switzerland on the work of directors of schools and socio-sanitary institutions, as seen below:

The ordinary work confronts rather a myriad of tasks to be handled and a permanent arbitration (sometimes painful, sometimes exhilarating but always absorbing) to be carried out between these tasks throughout the activity: the fact that each action (or almost) involves other human beings who can answer for it well or badly only amplifies the complexity of the practice, and feeds a persistent feeling of incompleteness and indetermination, both of the work and of the effort to be produced. (Gather Thurler & et al., 2017, p. 262, free translation)

We first confirmed how the work to be done is essentially heterogeneous, fragmented, even impregnated by incessant interruptions and involves constantly revising the order of priorities. On the one hand, this work is limitless because it is self-administered: the directors are most often the first judges of what they owe to others, in quantity and quality. On the other hand, the flow of their activity is so frequently disturbed that it overflows outside working hours (in the evening, mornings, weekends), to preserve moments of calm and continuity (...). (Gather Thurler & et al., 2017, p. 263, free translation)

Therefore, it is possible to perceive that the complexity of human relations always crosses school principals' work. In research conducted by Oliveira & et al. (2017), this relational aspect was also significant, as pointed out by the authors, "the mediation of conflict between the various actors who participate in the school routine has been a very recurrent dimension in school principals' practice" (p. 724, free translation). Then, in addition to prescribed work: tasks such as writing minutes, organizing class schedules, drafting documents, weekly meetings, among others, there is also a considerable and difficult-to-measure amount of relational work: attendance, conflict resolution, advice, and decisions, which is not very predictable. Thus, as stated by Gather Thurler & et al. (2017), these professionals need to be highly flexible in their work routine, since "(...)

leading is a work of ‘parallel engagements’, requiring both an agile and flexible navigation from one problem to another, but also the cutting firmness of a keen and proven sense of priorities” (p. 264, free translation).

Finally, it was also interesting to note that the management team is the leading support network for the work. The interviewees mention a certain distance between the teaching staff and the management team, as well as the resistance suffered by principals in Geneva primary schools reported by Progin (2017). Nonetheless, a crucial difference from the implementation of the PEI is that teachers could choose to stay or leave the school when the establishment joined the program. This program implies their total dedication and active participation in the school’s educational process. Although this is the proposal in theory, in practice, what is observed is different, some teachers are more engaged and are an essential support to the management team, but not all are. Moreover, the principals choose their deputies and pedagogical coordinators, which can influence the work dynamics for good, according to them.

What is the relevance of analyzing the practice of school principals as workers? In this chapter, we seek to understand the actual work carried out by school principals in Brazil. It is important to emphasize that the objective here is not to attribute a judgment of value about school principals but rather to understand their work in reality. As it was possible to observe, although they are middle managers in public schools, these professionals also execute work full of demands, and relational aspects. There is a legislative and programmatic framework for their function, but as the research has shown, work routine demands flexibility, and reality prevails over the norm. Understanding the nature of this work in practice is vital for us to analyze the role of school principals in the educational process and, mainly, how to support them in the challenging mission of preparing the school environment to offer quality education for all. In the next chapter, we will analyze how these professionals act as public officials in view of the implementation of an educational policy, the second dimension considered in this research.

5. Chapter 4 - Implementing an educational policy: School principals as State officials

After analyzing the actual work of school principals, it is also essential to examine their role as public officials. Through educational public policies, the State seeks to provide the conditions for learning, with students as the primary beneficiaries (Lima, 2019). Therefore, the school is a state institution, and school principals are public officials serving student learning. Thus, they are not only workers but public workers, with a function framed by legislation and guidelines of the public education system.

However, the position of school principals in the bureaucracy hierarchy is not easily defined (Lima, 2019). Authors state that they are middle-level managers (Barrère, 2006; Oliveira & Abrucio, 2018) or occupy a hybrid position (Mota, 2018, quoted in Lima, 2019). That is because they are placed in the particular position of responding directly to the system's demands and the school community's expectations, the two edges of a system. According to Lima (2019), "the principal is connected to the highest level – in this case, bodies representing the Public Sector (Municipal and State Secretariats of Education) – and, also, the school institution and all the actors that are there – management team, teachers, students, families, and the local community" (p. 95, free translation). This characteristic is essential to understand school principals' practice beyond the work dimension. As such, this research is interested in analyzing the action of these actors according to their professional socialization as public servants.

At this point, it is important to mention that the choice to analyze the practice of school principals in the face of the PEI Program implementation was precisely to observe their action in a context of change, that is, how they act and work when in the position of implementing a public policy that significantly transform the school environment. This research adopts the concept of public action (Thoenig, 1998, quoted in Hassenteufel, 2011), which considers the interaction of different actors at different levels to analyze public policy implementation. As it was possible to see in the literature, despite the formal norms that govern a function, there is a set of informal rules, ideas, values, and ways of doing that actors mobilize in the execution of public action (Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to note that there is no intention in this study to evaluate

the public policy itself, the PEI Program, since the focus is on how the implementing actors deal with it.

Hence, the second question we faced in this research is how school principals implement an educational policy in their respective schools. How is their adherence to the policy in question? What are their main challenges in the implementation process? What strategies do they use to overcome these challenges? How do they deal with the expectations of the education system and the school community? What are their perceptions regarding the PEI Program? These are the questions this chapter will address.

5.1 Motivations and perspectives on the PEI Program

I actively participated in the implementation, and I was in favor of it because, within my Regional Department of Education, I saw how much better the results of the full-time schools were than the others, much better. Everything, everything that happened seemed that in PEI had more quality. (Deputy Principal C, Min. 01:02:07)

Before analyzing school principals' practice in implementing the PEI Program, it is essential to explain how the school's adherence to the program takes place. For the school to become a full-time program, a favorable vote by the School Council is required, in addition to the school principal's will. In this way, all school actors must formally approve the program, teachers, employees, parents, and students. According to the São Paulo State Secretariat of Education³⁴,

In possession of the program guidelines and the guidelines provided by the Secretariat, the school principal of the unit indicated by the Regional Department of Education invites the school team and the school community to get to know the program and transmits the information received. Later, the school principal must call the School Council for the formal decision of adherence. The school principal

³⁴*Orientações para adesão ao Programa Ensino Integral, SEDUC-SP, p. 2.*

needs to record all meetings, with frequency control, and the identification and signature of the participants. (p. 2, free translation)

All schools visited for the fieldwork of this research became full-time schools under the leadership of the school principals interviewed. In three of the four schools (B, C, and D), the principals were the prominent supporters of the PEI Program implementation, taking the initiative for the school's adherence to the program. In just one school (A), the initiative came from the Regional Department of Education, based on a study of the region and the low educational indicators that the school had at the time. Even so, when presented with the program, School Principal A embraced the idea right away, as she reports, *At first, when I was introduced to the program, I said, "Wow! This model is the dream of any educator. It is perfect, it cannot go wrong". So, at first, I bought the idea (Principal A, Min. 06:58).*

Concerning the school principals who took the initiative to implement the PEI in their schools, the main reasons mentioned were the community's needs and the recovery of the school deficit worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. The community's needs are mentioned mainly by the two principals who work in the outskirts (Schools B and D). They mention that the program would significantly benefit the school community, offering better education for a more impoverished population, strengthening ties with families, and expanding students' perspectives. Principal C mentioned that she saw in the program an opportunity to recover the learning affected by the pandemic. Besides that, although the school is located in a more central neighborhood, she adds that the program would also help families experiencing food insecurity, as it offers three meals a day. Below are the testimonies of the three principals.

I said, "So now is the time for us to try to fight, to present to the community what the integral education program is, how it will benefit the community, for working parents, for vulnerable children, for these children who stay on the street, the benefits of this program". And then we started to go for it. (...) We gathered the School Council at the time, and we presented all the positive points, what we saw for the community, because I normally say that the management team must work in favor of the community (...) And we saw this need because they studied here part-time. And then when we went outside, we saw these students all the time on the street. Many had nothing to eat, you know? They used to eat during the school break, the school meal. It was one meal a day. So, we saw this need, including the need of parents to have these children and teenagers inside the school. (Principal B, Min. 10:32)

During the pandemic, I saw my students who already had bad results, not attending school, not delivering activities, not having internet access. So, the indicators, which were not good, plummeted. That was the first challenge. And I saw the full-time program as an opportunity for the student to recover learning in both periods. (...) And with a full-time school, I explained to the parents: “Your child will have breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snacks”. And we know that, unfortunately, some families do not offer even one meal a day for the student, right? So, I do have students who come to eat, but a good part of my students come to recover what the pandemic left behind. (Principal C, Min. 21:03)

The arrival of the integral education program is a watershed. Until 2020 the school was part-time, a school of this size without teachers. (...) Why do I talk about the community? It is not just the student; (...) I must reach the student and the family because if I only get to the student, I do not have a return line; I really need these parents to be here. (...) It is where the PEI comes in. (...) Now, with this support from a whole team, the possibilities, the chance of talking to the parents, of the most problematic student, with the most absent family, increases. Why does it increase? Because it is our obligation. We sign a term that we will dedicate ourselves fully and exclusively to the program. (Principal D, Min. 06:53)

Therefore, it is possible to notice that all school principals had significant motivations in favor of the PEI program implementation in their schools. Encouraged by the needs of the communities where they work or the possibility of obtaining better educational results, these principals headed the process of letting the school community approve the program. Thus, from the outset, the PEI program had high adherence by them. This observation is fundamental for analyzing these professionals' practice in the policy implementation, as we will see in the following section.

Consequently, their perspectives on the program are predominantly positive. It is interesting to mention that the principals' point of view concerning the program is an aspect they spontaneously mentioned in the interview situations, without being asked. After the school adheres to the program, and even though they are in the early years of the implementation process, the professionals already perceive many benefits of it.

At the school where the program started a longer time ago, the principal mentions a significant improvement in the school climate, with a reduction in conflicts. Moreover, the school's educational results have also improved, as Principal A states, *from 2016 onwards, we have been achieving the goals on a growing basis (...) both in secondary and elementary education (Min. 06:58)*. In schools where the program is more recent, the principals' perception is that students

already have a greater life perspective, there is less turnover and absence of teachers, and contact with families is closer. Principal B affirms that,

So, it was hard work, but today it is rewarding, and I am very happy to see the development of the program in the school. That today our students, in one year of the program, with the education they already have, have already incorporated the program. Knowing what they need, why they are here, and what the school intends for them. What is that? Why is school important? What is the purpose of school in their lives? Because students only stay in school from the moment they know the reasons for it. (Principal B, Min. 17:35)

There are only two negative aspects pointed out by one principal and one deputy principal. Principal C notes that the school no longer serves students who need to work during the day and study at night, a quite common reality in Brazil. Still, she says, *but I see more benefits than disadvantages, right? The matter of working students is something I cannot solve. It is a matter of public policy indeed (Principal C, Min. 37:18)*. The other aspect is presented by Deputy Principal A, the mediation of conflicts is a demand too voluminous for just one professional in the school, she affirms, *(...) the program is very beautiful. But with this high demand for a single professional and to develop quality work, you end up driving the professional to exhaustion, you know? (Deputy Principal A, Min. 25:35)*. As pointed out by Oliveira (2003 quoted in Parente, 2017), due to reforms in the Brazilian education, there is an expansion of the attributions of the school principals, through the increase of demands and responsibilities assumed by the school.

Regarding the program's characteristics, the school principals have a very positive perception. Segments of the education sector in Brazil criticize the PEI Program for having a managerial aspect since it proposes management instruments typical of the private sector, such as the focus on results, the evaluation of professionals' performance through a map of competencies, and the tools mentioned previously, as the PDCA cycle (Giroto & Jacomini, 2019). According to the principals, educational specialists conceptualized the program based on solid studies and reflections, which makes the model robust enough to bring good results if followed strictly.

The PEI is criticized for having this corporate vision. However, you need some of this organizational chart aspect when you have a vision for results. There is participatory democratic management, when the principal gives the opportunity to all segments to give their opinion and speak. But there is a sieve of what is technical because there is no point in saying, "Ah, school meal has to be like this. Education has to be like that", but it is

important to have the technical educational view of the people who studied for this; otherwise, it will not work, right? (Principal C, Min. 43:39).

Concerning this point, it is important to mention that the criticisms of the PEI are inserted in a broader context of analysis on the impact of the new public management in the public sector and, in particular, in the public education in Brazil. According to Oliveira & Giroto (2019), “currently, PEI schools are those in which management by results, conceived in the PECSP [Education-Commitment Program of São Paulo], has been implemented more intensely and completely” (p. 93, free translation). Moreover, the authors state that “it is observed, in this logic, an empowerment of the school principal in personnel management, at the same time that they have the responsibility for the execution of the Program and the achievement of the expected results, the relationship with the community, in addition to being a multiplier of the PEI in the education system, that is, a disseminator of positive evaluations about the Program so that other schools want to participate” (p. 94, free translation). However, this criticism is not present in the speech of the school principals and deputy principals interviewed, as we could note.

Contrary to what critics of the program claim, the principals presented another positive perspective on it: the focus on students and their integral formation. The principals mention that, besides the academic aspect, the program offers an education for life, by broadening students’ dreams, and working on their life project. They observe significant behavior changes in students after the program implementation at school. As the professionals state,

Today, after the program implementation, because we focus a lot on the life project, on the possibilities, on showing it, on working in the tutoring, on showing that whatever you like to do, there are many professions, how many means nowadays, you do not need to have money to go to college. (...) So we show this, and in doing so, we see other dreams. For example, we have a student who dreams of becoming a doctor. And she said she is going to be, and you see that she is going after it. The other wants to be a police officer. Then, we noticed this year that they started to change their focus. (Principal B, Min. 01:32:23)

The student who is the protagonist, who has to shine, who has to do, who has to develop. My teachers and I, it is our obligation. (...) So the student is the main figure of the program. However, for the student to be the main figure of the program, my team and I have to be aligned, giving all the support. This is not from one day to the next. (Principal D, Min. 25:21)

In addition, the interviewees mention that to work in full-time schools, professionals must have a specific profile: being focused, proactive, and seeking constant training. This point is also seen as positive by principals since it facilitates managing a less rotating group of teachers who adhere to the program's proposal. All principals and deputy principals agree that the work with teachers is better within the PEI Program and prevents certain behaviors common to part-time schools, according to them. The statements below illustrate this observation.

So, you realize that teachers who are mature in the program sit down and do what they have to do; they do not keep chatting. Got it? Because there is no time, it is too much [to do]. I had teachers last year who joined the program who came with these vices; these postures that are typical from part-time schools, right? It is unacceptable, even in part-time schools to have this kind of posture, but it happens. (...) But when he comes with these vices that "Oh, I'm here all day, I'm going to chat a little". It was tight because you have a PIAF³⁵ to do, an action program to do, and each document has a structure; you have to use PDCA, 5W2H. So, you have to pay attention. Each action is a text that you have to write. Why? When? Where? What time? In what place? (Principal C, Min. 01:39:31).

In the integral education program, we are in constant training. And it is our premise; we must study. We make the action plan for the whole school and our individual action program. We do our PIAF too, which is also another thing that makes us work on our weaknesses, in our difficulties, we must study. (Principal D, Min. 01:05:05)

Therefore, it is possible to observe that the school principals interviewed firmly adhere to the proposal of the educational policy in question, which significantly influences how they act for its implementation in their schools, as Barrère (2006) states, "even a distanced or reflective adherence can be associated with a concrete and practical commitment to implementing the reform" (p. 17). The professionals, for the most part, took the initiative on their own for their schools to become full-time, and all have a positive perception of the program, even though they are aware of the criticism it receives from other educational segments. In the following section, we will see the implications of this fact for the implementation process.

³⁵PIAF: *Plano Individual de Aprimoramento e Formação* (Individual Plan for Training and Improvement).

5.2 Playing chess: The challenges of the implementation process

I walked into this school and said it would become a full-time school. Because it also depends a lot on the principal's will. I said it would become. Then, at the first School Council, nobody wanted it. Then I started to play chess, as my physical education teacher usually says. So, I stepped back, set up a new School Council, put it up for them, and almost nobody volunteered to participate. Then I strategically chose who liked the [PEI] program. (Principal D, Min. 19:40)

At the beginning of this research, we had an assumption that one of the main challenges for school principals was precisely to find the balance between the demands of the educational system and the expectations of the school community, based on the idea that these two sides could be contradictory and bring difficulties to the principals' practice. In research realized by Parente (2017), for example, the author states that "this relationship of dependency between the principal and the higher instances often limits the school's organizational process, making the principal's work and decision-making difficult." (p. 262).

Nevertheless, this is different from what we observed in this research. When asked about their main challenges in implementing the PEI program, none of the school principals mentioned a clash between the school communities and the central bodies. Despite recognizing their position as mediators of these two edges of the system, this fact is not pointed out as a problem or challenge for the principals' professional practice. A possible explanation is precisely the fact that these principals act as accurate advocates for the program, adhering to it based on a positive perception they have of its premises. As highlighted by Demazière & et al. (2013),

Indeed, professionals – or at least some of them – can be for themselves actors in the introduction of a change defined exogenously (Spillane & Anderson); they can accompany the changes, adhere to them more or less critically, and participate in self-constraint mechanisms (Cattonar et al.); they can also find in their own beliefs and ideologies convergences with particular goals of NPM [New Public Management] widely considered as evident or unquestionable, such as the centrality of the user or academic success (Maroy & Vaillancourt). (p.11, free translation)

The school's adherence to the program, the first challenge mentioned by the principals, is an excellent example of how they let the school community approve the policy. Having the support of school actors to transform the school into a full-time program was challenging mainly for principals A, C, and D. Despite also mentioning the adhesion process as the first challenge for the implementation, Principal B points out the difficulty in having done it in the middle of the pandemic, online. Below, we will present how the process was conducted in each school.

School A is the only one where the initiative to become PEI came from the Regional Department of Education rather than the principal. However, as we have seen, the principal adhered to the proposal from the beginning. She mentions that the school had been losing students and, therefore, was considered to become full-time. According to her, the first difficulty was to convince the teachers since they would have to dedicate themselves fully to the school. As we commented in Chapter 2, it is common in Brazil for teachers to teach in different schools to complete their workload, sometimes even accumulating positions in different education systems, such as state, municipal, and private. The second point mentioned by her is drug trafficking by students, which was very present in the school at the time. The fact that students remain at school all day would hinder this activity. She mentions,

So, it was very, very tense for me for a while, but we managed, at first, to convince the teachers. And they embraced the cause. Most of them did not stay; they transferred to another school. However, they supported and voted in favor. Because they thought about the community, right? So, we support the project, we want this to happen for this community, but we cannot be here. (Principal A, Min. 06:58)

For Principal B, the main challenge was to present the program to the school community during the Covid-19 pandemic. First, she talked to teachers and employees. For her, it was important to make the teachers reflect on the community over their personal interests. Thus, to sensitize teachers through the school's mission. She mentions, *so, some chose to stay, others no (...) But this is a personal choice because I made it very clear to them. We cannot, at this moment, think about ourselves. We are going to reflect, think about our community, which is around us, and see what is favorable to them (Min. 26:12)*. Regarding the families, the challenge was more significant, as in addition to presenting the program online, it was necessary to communicate in a way that the public could understand and support. For this, she mentions having done a Herculean work,

We created WhatsApp groups with all the parents of the school, separated by classroom. Then we put together a portfolio talking about the program (...) And then, we made several videos talking about the program, what it was, the advantages, the disadvantages, and what it could bring to the community (...) Then, we used to put a very eye-catching reminder for them to be curious to watch the videos and to see what we were talking about. (Principal B, Min. 10:32)

In the case of Principal C, the first challenge was to convince teachers who did not want to lose their position at the school. According to her, *the teachers understood that the school wanted and needed it, but they did not want it because they would lose their position (...) And it is tough sometimes when a teacher or even a parent or student sees only the micro, only their situation, not the collectivity, right? (Min. 22:20)*. In this case, the principal presented arguments according to each audience. For teachers, the advantage was being linked to a single school, not needing to accumulate positions, and earning 75% more³⁶. For families and students, the possibility of recovering learning from the pandemic and having proper nutrition. She states,

To become PEI, you must have three decisions. You must have the principal's will, the community's acceptance, based on my research, and the School Council's approval, which is already a representative body. It has eight teachers. So, at the School Council, I had at the time, if I'm correct, it is made up of 20 people, I had four who did not want to, right? So, there are five parents, five students, eight teachers, and the staff, right? So, one student abstained, four teachers did not want to, and the rest all wanted to. So, I saw that the teachers' group was the one that really did not want at all. (Principal C, Min. 33:11)

Finally, the case of Principal D is interesting to illustrate how she worked throughout the year to compose a School Council that would approve the policy at the school. She says that since assuming the position, she has brought the idea to the school actors, who initially voted against it. In this way, she began to strategically invite the professionals who favored the program to the School Council. Then, she finally composed a Council that approved the PEI in the school. That way, Principal D acted like she was playing chess in her words. It is possible to note this process in the statement below.

³⁶Precisely because of the complete and exclusive dedication to a single school unit of the program and the additional and differentiated attributions, these professionals are entitled to the Full and Integral Dedication Bonus – GDPI, which corresponds to 75% of the respective base salary. Source: SEDUC-SP (2014). *Tutorial de Recursos Humanos, Programa Ensino Integral*, p. 9.

And everyone thought I would leave and not talk about PEI anymore. I set up the Council that I wanted. The last government opened the possibility of new PEI schools; I came with the knife and the cheese for my Council to approve. Then we managed to turn the school into full-time education. (...) Because it does not depend just on the Council, it depends on the Council and the community. What is more important? Is the Council important? It is! But the community is more. The school belongs to the student, it does not belong to the principal, it does not belong to the teachers, it belongs to the community. So, the community also understood that it was important. (Principal D, Min. 20:10)

At this point, it is interesting to note how the principals' adherence to the policy makes them act as true advocates of it in their acting schools. Contrary to what we had imagined before, the principals do not point out the demands of the education system concerning the PEI Program as a challenge because they agree with its guidelines and proposals, working determinedly to implement them. Of course, they mention difficulties that the implementation process added to the school management; however, the program itself is not put into question. It is possible to observe that its implementation in the schools has become a personal goal of the principals, as Principal D states, *so, that was my goal. What was your life goal at School D? I have already reached it, making it an integral education program. (Principal D, Min. 20:50).*

The challenge indeed mentioned by the principals, in addition to the adherence to the program, is that the program takes place in practice, that is, that students and teachers incorporate it. The passage from theory to practice is challenging because, according to them, it involves changes in the perspective and behavior of school actors. Therefore, the major challenge pointed out by the professionals is to work simultaneously on the integral formation of students and the improvement of learning, that is, the academic results.

Regarding the students, the most significant difficulty indicated is achieving what they call "academic excellence". According to the principals, after the PEI implementation, it is already possible to notice a behavioral change in the students, for example, fewer conflicts or the search to solve conflicts through dialogue, which they already see as a considerable benefit. Nevertheless, students still have several difficulties in learning and wanting to study the contents of the disciplines. As we see below, making them understand the importance of studies is a great difficulty pointed out by the principals.

[The challenge is to] make it happen in practice regarding the pedagogical aspect. So, it requires maturity of the team, much study, and behavior change in the student. The student

has to be a protagonist; and for him to be a protagonist, he must know what he wants and why he comes to school. So, students today are no joke; they have to take a life project class, go to school, understand why they are here, what they have to study for, and what school means in their lives. So, this is our biggest challenge. (Principal D, Min. 24:08)

The school has improved by 70% in everything, relationships, coexistence, everything. However, in terms of learning, how are students still doing? Many difficulties in learning. In what sense? They still need to have this vision of why I study. (...) Because in our community, it is still intense work, which is a goal that we still have to focus on, that they need to learn how to learn, you know? They still need the skills, the content, the knowledge, the subject itself, and the discipline so that they can think about their life project at this juncture. (...) “Wow, is the school working well? Yes!”. In terms of behavior, in coexistence, hands-on, if you propose the students to do something, they do it right away. They do not say no. But if you propose them to study for a test, for an evaluation, it is a sacrifice. (...) Where is our problem? That they realize the importance of knowledge. It is a challenge. (Principal B, Min. 01:25:48 - 01:31:25)

The challenge of taking ownership of the program also extends to teachers, according to the professionals. Mainly the deputy principals, who have more significant contact with them, mention the importance of behavior and pedagogical practice changes. At the behavioral level, they report that it is essential for teachers to understand that all school actors must work together. For example, in the case of classroom conflicts, the teacher must carry out a first mediation. In the pedagogical aspect, according to them, the PEI requires teachers to give more dynamic classes and to improve their didactics. The statements below illustrate these points.

Moreover, when we talk about interdimensional development, it is not just about the student but also about us. Because if I cannot deal with all these situations, how will I collaborate for the student's interdimensional development? What reference does he have? Because sometimes, in his social context, he does not have these references, right? Dealing with all these emotional issues, and if I do not have either, it gets complicated. What reference will he have? He will not have a reference, right? So, this is a challenge. (Deputy Principal A, Min. 45:27)

It is the teacher seeing himself in the program, you know? They are still very attached to the part-time schools. The teachers who came from the PEI have already a better vision. (...) It is the part of making the teacher understand the mediation, when the problem becomes mine alone and when it is ours too. This is an obstacle that still requires me to study more to make the teachers understand that we are working together (...). (Deputy Principal B, Min. 24:53 - 27:45)

You can see that the students here have no interest in another language. Then this year, the English teacher started to do practical things. It was very nice. She did a presentation with the third year, and she did it as if they were inside a restaurant. She set up fake dishes, everything. And one was the waiter who had to serve, all in English, and they really liked it. (...) Because, as I told you, it is no use wanting to teach them another language, having them sit here with the notebook and saying, "You're going to study". They still do not have that stop-and-learn mentality. But if you put it into practice, they learn. (Principal B, Min. 01:37:20 - 01:37:45)

Therefore, it is possible to notice that the main implementation challenges mentioned by the principals are, in the first moment, the adherence to the program; and, in the second moment, its development in practice, mainly in the pedagogical field. Moreover, principals see the second challenge as a consequence of the lack of maturity of the program at school since they are in the early years of its implementation. Thus, from their point of view, for the program to become effective in practice, it takes time and a maturity process for both students and the team as a whole.

5.3 Discussion

As they are at the head of a state institution, school principals are conceptually defined as middle-level bureaucrats (Lima, 2019). As public officials and workers, they find themselves in an intermediate position between the higher instances of the public education system and the school community where they work. Thus, they have direct contact with the beneficiaries of educational policies, characteristic of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980). At the same time, they suggest general guidelines for the public equipment and deal directly with public resources, activities similar to those at the top of the bureaucracy (Oliveira & Abrucio, 2018). According to Lima (2019),

Souza (2006, p. 171) points out that the school principal, as a public official, is a 'bureaucrat, in the Weberian sense of the term [since] it is his function, among other things, to establish a dialogue between the State and the school community; and, as such, he plays a local leadership role'. As a bureaucrat, the school principal plays a double role: representing the State and the actors of the school unit he manages (Oliveira, 2015). (p. 95, free translation)

In this way, school principals are critical actors in the implementation of educational public policies. According to Oliveira & Abrucio (2018), “putting it in another way: it is at the forefront of public services that mid-level bureaucrats make the most difference to public policy and are most clearly characterized as a different and strategic bureaucratic type for the behavior of the high-level and street-level bureaucracy” (p. 222, free translation). In this position, school principals act as a bridge between State directives and the demands of the school community. For this reason, they are key actors in transforming the school into a significant learning and development environment for students, the final beneficiaries.

As we saw from the adherence process of the PEI Program, the school principals acted as true advocates of the policy in their schools. All professionals had strong motivations to work for the implementation of the policy. As stated by Demazière & et al. (2013), “thus, the translation of educational policies into teaching practices appears to be directly dependent on the investments that school principals devote to them (Barrère), their commitment to mobilizing teaching teams, and their ability to combine political injunctions, teaching practices, and the institutional environment (Spillane & Anderson)” (p. 13, free translation). In this way, school principals act as translators of educational policies at the local level.

Acknowledging this position as strategic led us to question the principals’ room for maneuvering in their fields of action and what challenges are present in their professional practices as mediators of two extremes of the same system. As mentioned by Mazeaud & Nonjon (2021), “due to their hierarchical position, the responsibilities they exercise and the role assigned to them, these intermediate officials are led to give meaning, to shape and to stabilize procedures and rules in an uncertain context, marked by multiple reforms. (...) Thus, they assume a ‘central role’ (Barrier & et al., 2015) in the reform processes” (p. 359, free translation).

In this research, it was interesting to note that the school principals did not mention this role as mediators as a challenge in their professional practice in the context of the PEI Program implementation. Unlike what we initially imagined, the main challenges mentioned by the principals concerning the policy were its adhesion process and its concretization in practice. Thereby, the professionals do not mention difficulties in balancing the two edges of the system that they deal with daily. One explanation for this is precisely the high adherence of school principals to the program since they all evaluated it positively and fostered its implementation in

schools. This observation is noticed in the specific context of this policy, for which the school principal's consent is mandatory. It is essential to note, though, that in the case of a policy whose implementation is mandatory, this finding may be different.

In the research conducted by Oliveira & et al. (2017) on the influence of the new public management (NPM) in Brazilian public schools, the authors state that school principals assimilate and reproduce the values of this logic, as it was the only possibility. According to them, "in this context, NPM is being assimilated by public education managers, from the ministry to schools, pursuing a supposedly efficient and dynamic State that seeks more results with less use of resources. The principles of efficiency imported from the private sector are being naturalized as universal values, and one no longer asks what the purposes of the public are. In the school context, these guidelines are being assumed as objective and pragmatic strategies that are presented not as a way to respond to problems, but as the only possible answer" (p. 725, free translation).

Nonetheless, we notice in this research that the implementing actors act in favor of the policy locally due to a strong sense that they attribute to it. Thus, not only from assimilation and reproduction. The premises of the program align with the personal and professional values of the principals interviewed, which sustains their adherence to its implementation. As Demazière & et al. (2013) point out, "this does not mean, on the contrary, that they have converted to the reforms, but at least that they adhere to their general orientations (academic success, importance of the students), and find a space to develop concrete initiatives to mobilize teachers (Spillane & Anderson)" (p. 15, free translation).

From a cognitive approach, Siciliano & et al. (2017) study the formation of bureaucratic beliefs in the face of reforms in a public school district in California. The authors indicate that "how bureaucrats come to understand a reform and develop a set of reform-related beliefs are key dimensions in the implementation process (Spillane & et al., 2002)" (p. 890), since "the beliefs that people hold are a central determinant of their actions (Bandura, 1997)" (p. 890). Therefore, the adherence of the school principals to the policy is fundamental to its implementation locally, as we could notice in the case of the PEI Program in the analyzed schools.

6. Chapter 5 - Exercising leadership: What does it mean to be a school principal?

In the field of school management, a concept that has been increasingly explored is that of leadership. According to Northouse (2007, quoted in Brest, 2011), “leadership is a process by which a person exerts influence over others to achieve a common objective” (p. 334, free translation). In the previous chapters, we analyzed school principals’ actual work and their role as public officials. As we have seen, the influence of these professionals on the PEI Program implementation in the schools was fundamental. Therefore, this chapter will analyze how school principals exercise leadership in their fields of action, acting as educational leaders.

While management is closely related to the process, such as planning, coordinating, and controlling, leadership is related to motivating people to pursue a common goal based on values and a vision for the school (Bush, 2022). Then, leadership is about giving sense to one’s actions (Wart, 2003, quoted in Brest, 2011). However, the complete distinction between different leadership styles as well as management is not evident. In the literature, some authors even claim that the concepts go alongside and that sometimes school principals use different types of leadership and a management approach to achieve the objectives set (Brest, 2011; Yvon, 2019).

Currently, it is possible to find different conceptions of leadership, such as managerial, instructional, transactional, transformational, and distributed leadership, among others (Bush, 2022). However, it is essential to emphasize that this research does not aim to categorize the leadership style of the school principals but to understand it. Above all, the objective is to comprehend which elements are present in their practice and how they develop their own leadership. That is, how they deal with and influence the different school actors: students, teachers, employees, and families. In reality, we observed that it can be difficult to fit the professionals’ practice into a single concept since their action most often presents a hybrid trait.

Therefore, the third question we faced in this research is how school principals exercise leadership in their daily school routine. What do school principals think about their role in the educational process? Is there a gap between what they think and what they actually do? What are the main challenges and the main learnings highlighted by them about their position? These are the questions this chapter will address.

6.1 Principals' vision of the role and changes over time

(...) It is my role to make students dream, to encourage the dream, and that they have the intention to achieve it. That's what I see today. (Deputy Principal C, Min. 01:06:19)

Before analyzing school principals' actions in concrete situations, it is interesting to underscore how they perceive their role. It is relevant to understand the professionals' vision of their function, that is, the meaning they develop about it, which can drive their practice. According to Progin (2017), "this heterogeneity [of the role's reality] and this vagueness leave room for significant interpretation of how school executives, particularly school principals, conceive and appropriate their role as leaders" (p. 14, free translation). In this way, we first asked the interviewees what they believed their role was; and, secondly, their perceptions of its changes over time.

The school principals mention many aspects of their role that draw near to a leadership concept. It is very present in the speeches that it is a role of transformation, generating change, positively impacting students' lives, guiding them, and opening doors so students can soar to higher goals. There are also aspects that come closer to a management approach, such as ensuring the proper functioning of the school and that everyone can perform their duties. In addition, the deputy principals have special attention to the school climate, in which their role is to support the cohesion of school actors and a healthy environment for the teaching and learning process.

The first point mentioned about the role of school management has to do with the idea of transformation. The desire to expand their areas of action and positively impact other people's lives was present in the motivations of these professionals to enter school management, as we saw in Chapter 3. This vision continues to guide their professional practice. Thus, the principals mention that their role is transforming reality through education, mainly the student's reality. They believe their purpose is to make a difference in student's lives, so their practice shows them that education makes sense. This aspect was more strongly present in the speeches of principals A, B, and D and deputy principals C and DI. As the principals state,

And then believing in this education, that it is what will transform, regardless of where you are, is very important (Min. 33:08). (...) My role..... Is that people see in me that education makes sense (Min. 01:00:49). (Principal A)

What is my role? My role is the transformative of change because it is not me. (Min. 28:40) (...) It is really making the school happen. Where we are most needed, that is where the change must happen. (...) So, what is my social role? The role of change. (Min. 57:28) (Principal D)

The second point highlighted by school principals relates to the means for this transformation to happen: guiding, giving opportunities, and being an example to students. Principal B mentions her role of guiding them through reflection and giving them opportunities. Deputy Principal A affirms that her function is to support the interdimensional development of students. Finally, Deputy Principal DI points out the importance of being an example within the school and the desire to inspire students. The vision of their role as facilitators and boosters of the formation and journey of students is preponderantly present in the speeches of Principals A, B, D, and Deputy Principals A, C, and DI. The statements below illustrate these points.

I believe that my function as Deputy Principal here is... to collaborate for this humanization, but in a way that the person sees herself as an interdimensional being, that the problem is not in the other, but in me. (...) So I think that is my mission; to humanize, but a humanization aware of the need for interdimensional development, that we all need improvement, and that the problem is not in the other. I am. I am the relationship. I am not in a relationship. I am the relationship. (Deputy Principal A, Min. 54:50)

So, what is my role as a school principal? Give direction. (Min. 42:47). (...) I am not here to close doors but to open doors. (Min. 01:35:24). So, as a principal, what do I believe to be my role? It is opening doors. And give them opportunities to participate. (Min. 01:37:45) (Principal B)

I believe my role is to make a difference with them in terms of being confident that they can believe in where they are. (...) So I think it is about being an example, you know, being an example. (...) my role is to be a difference in their lives, setting an example, setting an example within the school, which can be a better future for them. (Deputy Principal DI, 47:49)

Another point mentioned, mainly by the Deputy Principals, is the role of helping in the relationship between everyone, linking the management team and the other school actors, and favoring a good school climate. The Deputy Principals see their function as a support to the

principals in mediating relations in the school. Besides that, they mention the role of ensuring a good school climate by listening to and welcoming all school actors. This vision is primarily present in the speeches of Deputy Principals B, C, and DII, as we see below.

How do I see it... I see it as a... link between management, teachers, and students. It is... to help welcoming; it is knowing how to listen; it is being better for someone. (Deputy Principal B, Min. 32:45)

My role is to be responsible for a good school climate. And to contribute to academic excellence and the life project. (...). (Deputy Principal C, Min. 01:06:19)

I think it is to help the principal in this link with everyone. So, not only teachers, but school agents, cooks, and cleaners, so we all have a pleasant work environment. It starts here and goes on until it reaches the students and families, right? So, it is leaving our environment harmonious, with much respect and complicity between everyone. So, this is the main thing. (Deputy Principal DII, Min. 01:01:48)

Finally, the function of making the school run well and that everyone can perform their duties was also mentioned as a role of school principals. This view is more closely linked to the managerial aspect of school management. Although it is possible to identify this aspect in the speech of different principals, it is interesting to note that it is present mainly in the speech of Principal C when asked about her role. According to her, the principal's function is to ensure what needs to be done concerning the demands of the school. Below, she illustrates this vision using an example.

Today I see myself as a person who needs to ensure things happen. I must create spaces for that to happen. So, when a teacher says to me. "Oh, I have tutoring, but when it comes to talking about personal issues, it is difficult. And why? Because I want to talk about a subject with a student, and in the same room, everyone is listening". It was something that they brought to me. And I am the one who makes the school schedule. So, what did I do? Everyone, every day, must do 45 minutes of tutoring. (...) I dismembered. So, every day, you will do 30 minutes collectively and then 15 minutes individually. I guaranteed, didn't I? And they will have to qualify and improve this tutoring now. (...) So, what I see today of my role is, in addition to what the map of competencies proposes, to guarantee that everyone can perform their function. (Principal C, Min. 01:16:48 - 01:17:32).

Therefore, in most cases, it was possible to observe that the vision of school principals about their role is significantly anchored to values. The connection to a greater mission based on values and purposes is characteristic of leadership exercise (Bush, 2022). According to Bush

(2022), “most definitions of leadership emphasize the need for transparent and substantiated educational purposes on explicit personal and professional values. Often, they are contained in vision statements” (p. 12, free translation). However, in the case of School Principal C the vision of the principal’s role as a manager was more prevailing, once more focused on processes.

Despite nuances regarding how school principals see their role today, all interviewees believe that this role has changed over time. The professionals call the school principals in the past “cabinet principals”. According to them, these principals acted as real bosses or “owners of the schools”. They used to work only from their offices and were distant from the school actors. Their prominent role was to deal with the school’s administrative aspects, and they had a very punitive profile for conflict resolution. Thus, school management was characterized by a rigid hierarchy with authoritarian aspects. The principals explain that,

The principal was the one who was in his office, a real cabinet principal, sitting there, handling his demands, without contact with anyone; he was a boss. The principal was the boss. (...) In the past, we did not even know who the school principal was (...) he was distant. He could not relate to the others, right? So, what was the role of the principal? It was the administrative and the punishment part. What was the principal for? If you went to the principal’s office, you would be punished. (Principal B, Min. 01:18:58 - 01:20:28)

In the past, the principal was a cabinet principal. (...) The deputy embraces everything, and the principal is untouchable. He stays in the office, signing papers, and that is it. (...) And there is this principal just signing the paper, staying alone in his office, no one interfering, no one talking to (...) of people bringing him coffee, things that have nothing to do with it, you know? Of having his parking space because he is the principal. (Principal D, Min. 58:25)

So, it has changed a lot, a lot. Wow! I worked in schools where you could not access the principal in any way; the only contact we had was with the pedagogical coordinator, and only at the meeting time to say what we had to execute. So I dealt a lot with this in 1993, in the government change, I saw a lot... I have been in the State [education system] for 30 years. (Deputy Principal A, Min. 50:54)

Nowadays, the school principals state that this role is entirely different, and all of them see this change as positive. Today, they mention that it is necessary to participate in the educational process, to be open, and interact with all school actors. That way, it is no surprise that they emphasize the importance of circulating the school and having a broad view of what happens in the establishment. As Principal B states, *you need to be present to know what is going on.*

Because how are you going to manage a school if you are unaware of what happens inside it? (Min. 01:16:20). Then, the main characteristics of a school principal these days, according to them, are active listening, flexibility, transparency, a humanized approach, and, mainly, the ability to establish a dialogue with everyone. In addition, they attribute this change to societal changes and affirm that by acting this way, they achieve better results. The statements below illustrate this point of view.

The principal is the one who must be engaged with the process; he has to be participative, he has to have a broad vision, he has to be everywhere (...) He has to belong, be in the middle of everyone, establish a dialogue, and talk to others. So, I see this difference (...) Today, the principal within the school, I do not see it that way (...) When we call [the students], the reason is to give guidance, listen, understand what is going on, and see if they have a problem. (...) Before education was different, society was another one, there was hierarchy and power. Regardless of whether the person was mistreated or not, whether there was respect or not, there was power. I am above you, so I treat you however I want. It was by power. Today we see that you get much more through dialogue. If I respect you, you respect me. If you know how to talk to me, I know how to answer you. And you get a lot more out of teenagers if you know how to talk to them. (Principal B, Min. 01:18:58 - 01:20:28)

It is like I said before, this close relationship, right? The student is closer to the teacher today. And I see that this also happened. The management team is also closer to the teachers. (...) Both the teachers and the students. We have open doors here; it is not just a facade. (...) So you listen, reflect; sometimes you cannot hear a family's situation and share it with everyone, the teachers, no. So, you filter everything, and then you see how to present it, so it is positive in that student's education. So, I think what has changed is this point of how to relate, the relationship itself, being closer to the teacher too, and listening to the teacher more. I see this proximity as a differential. (Deputy Principal DII, Min. 01:04:52)

Therefore, the school principals interviewed believe they act differently from principals in the past. This perception accompanies the evolution of the concepts in the school administration field, of principals as administrators to managers and, more recently, leaders (Gunter, 2019). The professionals report a way of acting compatible with their vision of the role. That way, they consider themselves more open, participative, flexible, and dialogic. In the following session, we will observe how this practice takes place in reality, based on the narrative and observation of concrete situations.

6.2 Exercising leadership: How school principals act with the school actors

I am very easygoing, right? I am very much for balance, well-being, leaving the person and the school atmosphere, you know, calm and pleasant, it's very good. However, when I need to be firm, I also know how to be. So, they know the limits. You can talk to me, I listen; I think the key secret of management is knowing to listen. So, I listen, but whatever decision I need to make, I will make it. (Principal D, Min. 17:10)

It is essential to mention that leadership is usually conceptualized as the relationship between leaders and followers (Bush & Glover, 2014), in the case of schools, the direct relation between principals and teachers. However, for the educational objectives to happen, all school actors must participate and engage in the process. As stated by Progin (2017), “there is leadership in all interactions, since it has to do with exercising an influence on others” (p. 21, free translation). Therefore, in this research, we consider that observing how principals deal with students and families is also crucial to understanding their practice as educational leaders.

For this reason, we will analyze their practice in interaction with the various school actors or their “action zones”, as used by Barrère (2006), in concrete situations. Thus, based on anecdotes narrated in the interviews and events followed in the observation *in loco*, we will analyze situations and challenges experienced by the professionals with the main school actors: students, teachers, and families. In this way, it is possible to notice how they act in reality and which elements are present in their professional practice.

6.2.1 The Students

I like being very close to them. (...) Because I earn respect in a very peaceful and calm way. (...) Sometimes I joke and ask how it was, but I think I am serious, you know? I am close but serious, so I end up getting that limit. They do not tease me, as they do with some teachers, for example. (Deputy Principal C, Min. 40:03 - 40:52)

In general, the school principals who participated in this research are close to the students. In part, because within the PEI Program, they have an important pedagogical role, more expressive than their peers in part-time schools. Therefore, the focus on the student is an important principle of full-time schools. The professionals claim to be very dialogical with the students and that this posture brings them better results. From the examples, it is possible to realize that they manage to establish a challenging balance in their relationship with students, between listening and dialogue and, at the same time, exercising authority based on respect and not on authoritarianism. This characteristic was very present in all the interviews.

The first example that illustrates the dialogic posture expressed by the principals is reported by Principal D. She says that a group of girls once exploded a bomb inside the women's bathroom at school. The management team began fact-finding the situation and started the mediation process with the students involved. According to Principal D, instead of punishing, she established a dialogue to understand why the action happened. Upon realizing that the principal's posture was not punitive, the girls felt comfortable sharing two serious situations that had led them to explode the bomb. The first girl reported that the mother suffered domestic violence from her stepfather, who is a drug dealer. Moreover, a second student related suffering sexual abuse from her stepfather. In this way, the principal chose fostering over punishment because she understood in her own words that *they blew the bomb because the bomb in their lives was much bigger than the bomb inside the women's bathroom* (Min. 12:09). She narrates,

So, a bomb, well discussed, from a problem with a bomb in the bathroom that had never happened to me in my management period, in the women's bathroom, I got a case of abuse, an abusive relationship between the stepfather and the mother, and the girl telling me,

explaining everything; and a case of abuse by a stepfather. But I do not have all the time that I would like to, so there is going to be a lot going on that I will not see. (Principal D, Min. 12:09)

When asked about how she established this bond of trust so that the students felt safe to report the case, she explained that it is a day-to-day relationship.

The actions, like, I am the kind of principal who talks, establish a dialogue; we will even hug, talk about the presents, and I can tell them something about my personal life, right? [Something] that there is no problem to tell. But they will never think I am their friend. I am the principal. They can like me, I can smile at them, but we know how to set limits, right? So, there is, as a manager, we have this... identity close to the student, but you set the limits. She is super cool and nice, but she is my principal ((laugh)). (Principal D, Min. 15:29)

Principal B narrates the second example that illustrates the flexibility exercised by the principals. Students must choose which Youth Club they will participate in at the beginning of the year. Nonetheless, they often start in a club and, over time, realize they do not fit in well. There is a need to keep the number of students per club balanced; therefore, moving a student from a club means changing the entire planning. However, Principal B mentions her preference for being flexible and accommodating the students' demands because, according to her, *when people do what they like, the result is different* (Min. 47:34). She adds, *I have a mindset that nothing is set in stone, we can adjust everything* (Min. 47:34). In this way, the principal is open to meeting students' demands. She states,

I usually say that we have to think that we are forming them, but at the same time, we must facilitate our work. And it is not hitting head-on or being against. It is more of you looking, analyzing, and seeing the look of an eagle, everywhere, and seeing where you need to ease situations. (...) And I say that teenagers are in the change, in the transformation. And then you have to be flexible to work with them. And I see that it is not by going head-to-head that you will get a result. It involves dialogue, reflecting, looking, and considering what they are proposing. (Principal B, Min. 51:40)

This proximity between principals and students was confirmed in the observation *in loco*. During the accompaniment of professionals, it was possible to witness several moments in which students came to talk to the principals in a very spontaneous way. We could also follow two conflict mediation situations in schools C and D, when it was possible to observe the exercise of listening and dialogue. If school principals were seen as authoritarian and punitive figures in the past, the

observed posture of the interviewed principals embodies leadership characteristics. By being close to students, the principals claim to inspire them to value school-based education and continue their schooling. According to Leithwood & et al. (2006, quoted in Bush & Glover, 2014), “leadership acts as a catalyst for beneficial effects, including pupil learning” (p. 553). If the positive relationship between school principals and students could eventually impact the permanence of students in schools, even before their academic performance, that would already be very positive for Brazilian secondary education.

6.2.2 The Teachers

I joke with them that we can even have a beer outside, but here I am the principal. You can be my personal friend to the point that I frequent your house, but here I am a principal, not in the sense of imposition, of hierarchy, no. My function demands that I do something and have a specific role in the face of school structures. So, here, I will exercise my role, and you will exercise yours. So, the limits, right? Everything is well established. (Principal D, Min. 16:31)

School principals mention having a good relationship with teachers. According to them, historically, there has been a barrier between the management team and the teaching staff, implying resistance. Nowadays, they mention an effort to dispel this idea and to make teachers understand that everyone works together for the same objective. For this, the principals affirm paying attention to the human being, the well-being of professionals, and noticing the “little nothings”³⁷ of everyday life. In addition, they always seek to sensitize teachers concerning their mission in education, making them reflect on their profession. Finally, a third aspect that the professionals use for this purpose is the legislation to explain what is possible or not to be done. The statements below exemplify these points.

And then it is the handling, the way you lead your group, showing them why we are here. I tell them a lot that we are here because we chose to work in education. (...) Because this is

³⁷The Deputy Principal DII mentions the concept of “little nothings” (free translation), which, according to her, is brought by Jorge Guzo and Antônio Carlos Gomes da Costa, mentors of the PEI Program. It means to be an active presence at school, observing school actors, and identifying behaviors that may not seem significant initially but that inform something about what school actors are experiencing.

our function here as educators, you know? We have to form these students for life. (...) So, I say this a lot to the teachers, let us think about our reasons. If I do not have a reason for being here inside me, my profession has no meaning, right? (Principal B, Min. 26:12)

We have clashes. Here, we try not to, but we end up having it because the management team, throughout history, was punitive, top-down, you know? So, we have these obstacles regarding school management. So, we talk, show, and call the area coordinators to talk together (Min. 10:27) (...) There are hierarchies, which the program itself makes teachers understand in this process. Each one has his-her square, but everyone has co-responsibility; everyone needs everyone (Min. 28:27). (Deputy Principal B)

A significant challenge Principal A mentioned is motivating the team and maintaining a good working atmosphere in the face of a situation that also distresses her. The principal says that the school year began with the absence of two teachers, generating work accumulation for teachers who had to replace their colleagues. A characteristic of PEI schools is that the teachers must replace their peers, that is, the school must refrain from resorting to an external substitute teacher. Principal A mentions that this generated much stress in the team and worsened the work climate since teachers started questioning whether they were having more work than their peers. The way she dealt with the situation was to listen and provide transparency to management actions. In this way, she laid out the rationale used to escalate replacement teachers to gain understanding and collaboration. Below we read her statement.

So, we lack two professionals essential to the school's pedagogical process. (...) And we started the year that way. (...) Then, in the relational climate, it is still February, and everyone is super stressed. And this makes the work of management very difficult. (...) And with everyone's overload, it obstructs [the process], and sometimes we cannot follow the step-by-step for the year to start well. And we already foresee damage ahead. This situation makes me very distressed. Try not to pass this on to the team is a huge challenge. (...) It is a huge challenge to maintain an atmosphere that is at least reasonable, an atmosphere... of organization, of the whole team, also being destabilized. My hands are also tied because I cannot hire a new teacher or ask for a new teacher. After all, the program's legislation does not allow it. (Principal A, Min. 21:28 - 25:12)

Principal B reports a case of a teacher's dismissal, which is also interesting for us to analyze. She reports that the teacher had many methodological and coexistence difficulties with students in the classroom. The case generated a lot of indiscipline and complaints from school staff and even families. The principal mentions that she has had a very humanized look at the teacher, trying her best to work for his training and improvement. She followed all official protocols and

asked the pedagogical coordinators and the deputy principal to assist in the process. However, according to her, the professional was not open to changing his practice and was dismissed from the program. Principal B mentions having no regret about the case because her attitude was humanized, reflected, and built collectively.

So, I have something with me that I try until the last moment. We are all human beings, so nobody is perfect. Moreover, we were beginning a program; nobody knew anything. So, we were there for each other. (...) So we tried everything that we could to help, you know? However, it also depends on each one to see the need for improvement because if the person does not realize that they need to make some changes, you can do anything for them to change. Because you must look and reflect on yourself in your work. (...) I have peace of mind that I did not take any impulsive action. [The process] was done with great care, thinking about the human being, and trying to help, train, and make the professional grow. But, as I told you if the person does not want it, it does not happen. (Principal B, Min. 54:43)

Thus, it is possible to notice that school principals assume their role as school managers. They must ensure the proper functioning of the school and the performance of each one's function according to what the education system requires of them. With the teaching staff, they mobilize management approaches in some situations, for example, using legislation. A possible explanation is that influencing people can be a more challenging and time-consuming process, especially in complex organizations such as schools. In this case, it can be convenient for principals to mobilize their role as managers depending on the type and the urgency of demands.

At the same time, there is a desire to exercise leadership. Progin (2017) states that "managing a school requires demanding a subjective engagement of actors in their work that surpass the simple respect of norms, obligations, and formal attributions if they exist. Then, we expect from school principals a leadership disproportionate to the basic control (without renouncing it) and an influence exercise, not only on individuals - asking each one to hold their function and do their job - but on a collectivity" (p. 18, free translation).

It is interesting to reflect that teachers, especially in Brazil, have different trajectories and motivations regarding their profession. In this sense, inspiring and influencing them around a greater mission can be challenging for school principals, as it requires building a shared sense of the profession from common values. The principals interviewed try to establish a positive relationship, partnership, and collaboration with teachers. The hierarchy is present, but it is

exercised in a non-authoritarian way. Thus, as Progin (2017) points out, the desire for leadership is tested by the reality of the function, which can lead principals to combine different approaches depending on the situation.

6.2.3 The Families

What is the main challenge? The community! (...) We want them to learn values, right? So, what is the difficulty? It is life in the most complex way it is. We receive students from different forms. Thus, working in an integral education program in a community like this is challenging. (Principal D, Min. 05:47)

The principals affirm that for integral education to occur effectively, the engagement of families in the school's educational process is fundamental. All interviewees claim to have a good relationship with the families. The main challenge they face regarding the families is dealing with their concept of school, whether in cases where the school has a bad reputation or when they expect a more punitive response in conflict situations. Thus, the professionals seek to show families the quality education full-time schools can offer their children and the importance of their participation in this process.

A tough event is reported by Deputy Principal A. A student suffered situations of racism at school. In an attempt to empower the child through historical characters, Deputy Principal A invited her parents to participate in an intervention. However, they pointed out that the professional used an inappropriate term, affirming she was not qualified to mediate the situation, besides the fact of being white. Then, the deputy sought external partnerships to initiate a broader pedagogical process on racism at school through teacher training, student awareness, and intentional integration of the theme into the curriculum. The family was unsatisfied with the proposition on how to handle the situation and filed a police report against the school. The Deputy states that,

(...) They [students and families in general] expect judgment from the management team rather than an educational process. They want a sentence, a punishment because the minor is committing an infraction. The school does not judge an offense act. The alleged infraction

committed by minors, for the school, is a sign of guidance about it. So, I need to bring these themes and how I will include them in the curriculum, bring and contextualize them for this student so that he can expand a process of conceptualization and awareness. And sometimes, society demands a different approach from the school. And then the [perception is that the] school did nothing. (Deputy Principal A, Min. 05:12)

It is essential to mention that racism is structural in Brazil (Almeida, 2019). In 2003, the government enacted Law 10,639, which includes the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in the official curriculum to promote the fight against racism through education. However, Brazil still has a long way to go on that purpose. The observed event illustrates that, unfortunately, these situations are still recurrent in Brazilian schools, and professionals are not sufficiently prepared to handle them.

A second event is mentioned by Deputy Principal C. According to her, a student pointed out the absence of neutral bathrooms at the school and wanted to use the men's bathroom. In addition, the student also expressed the desire to be called by another name. The deputy called the mother to find a solution to the situation. According to her, the legislation only allows changing the name at school with parental authorization. In this case, the student's mother did not authorize either the name change or the use of the men's room, although affirming to support her child's gender identity. Deputy Principal C states,

I called the mother to explain that we do not even have space; this subject is very delicate. Then the mother said, "No, I respect the identity that my daughter wants to have. But at the moment, I do not authorize her to enter a men's bathroom". I had this conversation, registered it, and they both signed. So, these are new situations that we have to mediate. It was smooth because the mother disagreed with the girl. However, if the mother agreed, we would have to analyze the situation. The school has rules, and this subject is very new. (Deputy Principal C, Min. 44:49)

Hallinger & Kovačević (2019) point out that in the school administration field, few academic productions consider aspects of race, gender, and social justice. It is interesting to observe that the cases reported relate to these aspects, reinforcing their urgency to be addressed.

Thus, it is possible to notice that the school principals pursue the families' engagement in the school's educational processes. Especially for sensitive situations, the participation of families in the construction of solutions and propositions is fundamental. On the one hand, school principals mobilize legislation in their relations with families regarding their manager duties. On the other

hand, they also seek to sensitize them about the pedagogical proposal of the school, as well as to engage them in pursuing the proposed educational objectives.

6.3 Principals' main takeaways from the practice

In each school where we work, we plant a seed, live different experiences, and learn each day. You learn from the team, the new students, and the community. Our work is continuous learning; every day is a new experience. I usually say that I get up in the morning, go to work, and learn something different every day. (Principal B, Min. 01:41:14)

Every professional practice develops and improves over time. The school principals mention that the daily practice at school is a source of invaluable learning. According to them, experience over time is the main factor that improves their professional practice. Therefore, it is also interesting to investigate the main takeaways of principals throughout their school management careers so far. The three key takeaways highlighted by the interviewees are the patience to not make decisions short-sighted, the establishing of a supporting network, and the emotional intelligence to handle the daily situations in the school routine.

Regarding the first point, the principals claim that it is essential to assess every situation before making a decision. They mention that at the beginning of their careers, they tended to be shortsighted to resolve situations quickly. However, over time, they realized that this attitude creates more problems. Therefore, the principals mention that having the patience to understand and analyze situations before taking action is essential. Deputy Principal DI state that,

Have the patience to analyze. Have the discernment to analyze because [the situation] is not always what is happening at that moment. So, you must be patient, listen to others, and try to understand the context because it is never short-sighted. You can never be short-sighted because sometimes you end up punishing something that could have been avoided, you know? So, always try to understand, to analyze the facts. (Deputy Principal DI, Min. 50:09)

The second takeaway mentioned is the importance of establishing a supporting network.

According to the professionals, the school principal cannot accomplish anything alone. Besides that, the principals state that the support of employees and teachers is essential, both for carrying out actions smoothly and for achieving educational objectives. As Deputy Principal DII mentions, it is essential to make *everyone understand that we are a single machine that needs the good running of all the parts, right? With just one piece, it will not work* (Min. 29:42).

Finally, the position of school principal teaches the professionals to be emotionally intelligent in the face of delicate situations. As we saw in the previous chapters, the daily routine of school principals is filled with different demands and requires intense relational work. Therefore, the principals claim to get used to dealing with complex situations in their daily work. Principal C reports that,

Then, after five years in school management, I understood that I was going to set foot in the school, and the bombs, the firecrackers, the protests, the mother screaming, the hysterical teacher, and the boy lying there on the floor, were going to be waiting for me. (...) in the fifth year, I understood what it is to be a school principal. (...) I got used to it. The boy can have a stroke over there, next to me, have a seizure, which has already happened! I will help the boy, call Samu [emergency mobile care service], and then have coffee, have an interview with you. But it took ten years for me to be what I am today. (Principal D, Min. 54:24)

6.4 Discussion

Currently, it is a consensus in the school management field that school principals are not only administrators. Although their function implies administrative tasks, the exercise of leadership has become an unavoidable component of school principals' practice (Progin, 2017). This change in the role of principals is verified in this research, in which the actual practice of these professionals changes from "cabinet principals" to participatory principals, from authoritarianism to listening, from a punitive to a dialogic posture, from just administrative to more relational work. The school principals' leadership is exercised in their relationship with all school actors. According to Progin (2017),

The function invites the school principals to control and influence the actors placed under their responsibility, in particular the teachers, but also the other professionals,

the students, and, to a certain extent, the parents and the external partners of the school (for example local authorities or members of a school commission or school council). (p. 37, free translation)

The school principals interviewed are aware of the social changes that imply exercising their function differently and in an updated manner. They have a very similar vision of the function. This vision leads the professionals to seek the exercise of leadership to influence and inspire school actors from a greater mission anchored in values. According to Brest (2011), “the transformational approach [of leadership] is thus based on the leader’s commitment to those who follow him around shared values and goals to overcome the conflicts that may arise from the claims and expectations of each one” (p. 336). These elements are present in the practice of school principals in concrete situations.

Nevertheless, the exercise of leadership is challenging. First, the context of schools, especially Brazilian schools, is complex. Whether due to structural aspects or the vulnerability of the communities where they are located. Second, the group of teachers is heterogeneous. Building a shared vision based on common values to mobilize teachers is not an easy task. Finally, school principals are held accountable for the decisions they make at school; as Barrère (2006) states, “(...) obsessions with preserving security, in a society that increasingly takes risks to court, weigh quite heavily on their professional experience” (p. 145, free translation). These aspects influence school principals to adopt managerial approaches in certain situations of the school day-to-day.

There are some things we cannot change. What do I think? What is set is set. What can I do? What autonomy do I have? Thinking about public policy, what autonomy do I have to do differently? I always work with this bias. What is up to me to impact the community, impact teaching, and make the school happen, whatever is in my hands, within my governance, will happen. (Principal D, Min. 26:52)

Thus, we can conclude that school principals’ practice is mixed, sometimes involving managerial and leadership aspects. Likewise, leaders can combine aspects of different leadership styles in their work, as stated by Brest (2011). According to Yvon (2019), “organizations need managers and leaders. Managers are the ones responsible for making the organization work (the how). Leaders are agents of transformation and give meaning to the organization. To use Drucker’s well-known expression: Management is doing things right, leadership is doing the right things” (p. 16). Bush (2022) further states that,

Principals and senior-level peers may need to act as leaders in certain ways, for example, by setting and communicating the school's objective. Still, a managerial approach is needed given some problems and events; especially when the school faces a crisis (...). Although short-term, top-down action is needed in response to immediate challenges, ensuring continued success requires a lucid, long-term vision that motivates and engages teachers, students, and other stakeholders. (p. 18, free translation)

Therefore, the changes in the practice of the school principals are positive. It is a complex function that requires sensitivity to navigate situations and demands of different natures. The perception of their role as a vector to transforming reality drives school principals to pursue a greater mission and inspire people. However, the characteristics of the function itself and day-to-day challenges lead the professionals to adopt a more managerial approach in certain situations. In any case, it is possible to notice that the school principals are guided by the school's educational objectives.

7. General discussion and conclusion

Workers, public officials, educational leaders... School Principals!

So, we must be a manager with a very open mind, reflective, and broad perspective (...). We must follow society and its evolution. There is no use in having a stuck mentality, given that society is evolving. So, we must evolve as society evolves and follow this evolution. It is useless for us to stagnate here while everything else keeps going. So, we must follow and go together. (Principal B, Min. 30:25)

This research aimed to answer the following general questions: What does the work of school principals in Brazilian public schools consist of? How do school principals implement an educational policy in their respective schools? How do school principals exercise leadership in their daily school routine? For this purpose, we investigated the practice of school principals from three lenses: the sociology of work (school principals as workers), the sociology of public action applied to education (school principals as public officials), and the concept of leadership (school principals as educational leaders).

The relevance of analyzing the professional practice of school principals from these three perspectives is due to the particular and strategic position they occupy in the educational process. School principals are middle managers (Barrère, 2006; Lima, 2019). Despite being in a position of authority, their work is also framed by the educational system to which they respond. In this way, the principals act as intermediaries between the education system and the school community they belong to. From this acknowledgement, understanding how these professionals implement public policies and exercise leadership locally is fundamental.

Regarding the actual work of school principals, three findings are interesting to highlight: the motivations that led them to school management, their entry into the function, and the nature of their daily work. Interestingly, as teachers, the professionals interviewed had a subjective investment, using the concept of Progin (2017), in their teaching activities. In other words, they spontaneously assumed functions beyond what was expected from them. This characteristic was

also observed in research by Barrère (2006) in France, in which the author states that the desire to integrate school management “is what we can call voluntary professional retraining (...). Most of the respondents were already doing in a way more than they were expected to do so as part of their ordinary professional practice” (p. 13, free translation). Therefore, the interviewed principals and deputy principals were motivated by the desire to expand their areas of action and the impact of their work.

However, another finding to point out is that the passage from the classroom to the management of the whole school is dramatic. The nature of the work changes completely, and principals learn to exercise their new role with the daily practice. This impact of changing roles is also observed by Progin (2017) in research conducted in Switzerland, the author states that “the concerns were hardly about the leadership that the principals would be able to exercise but mainly about how they would learn to occupy their new role by resisting the challenges encountered and to come” (p. 188, free translation).

Finally, it was possible to verify that the school principals’ work routine in Brazil consists of diverse demands and interruptions, similar to what other studies demonstrated in different countries (Barrère, 2006; Garther Thurler & et al., 2017; Parente, 2017). Even though the PEI Program defines the attributions of the management team, reality prevails over prescription. It is interesting to point out that a large part of school principals’ work, especially the unpredictable work, is relational. This fact can be explained by the school being a “living and dynamic organism” (Lück, 2017). As one of the deputy principals said, “where there are people, there are conflicts”. Therefore, even in the face of continuous planning efforts on the part of the management team, the day-to-day function consists of demands that are not always planable. As Barrère (2006) states, “contrary to the specialization and concentration specific to several expert activities, school executives perform varied, fragmented, and brief tasks. (...). When we ask school principals to describe a typical working day, they first refuse to do so, stating that it is an impossible mission and arguing that they are all atypical (...)”. (pp. 42-23, free translation).

When it comes to their action as public officials, precisely because of the mismatch between what is prescribed and reality, we had an assumption that one of the main challenges for school principals would be their role as mediators of the educational system and the school community. Nevertheless, that was not the finding of this research. In the context of the PEI Program

implementation, the professionals pointed out the main challenges were the school community's adherence to the program and its concretization in practice. Therefore, school principals do not mention the clash between the education system and the school community as a challenge to their professional performance.

One of the explanatory factors for this observation is the high adherence of school principals to the PEI program. First, for a school to become part of the PEI Program, the willingness of the school principal is necessary. In this research, all schools became full-time under the direction of the professionals interviewed. Thus, the principals showed great alignment with this specific public policy. According to them, the pedagogical proposal of the PEI schools is consistent, and the program's benefits for the community are evident. This fact demonstrates the importance of school principals' commitment to the implementation of policies at school level since, as stated by Mazeaud & Nonjon (2021), intermediary agents have power capable of influencing the outcome of public action. Therefore, the principals "played chess" to lead the school actors to approve the policy at the school.

Finally, when analyzing the role of school principals as educational leaders, this research found that their actual practice includes both aspects related to a managerial approach and leadership styles. The vision of the professionals regarding their role is strongly anchored in values and the idea of promoting social transformation. It is possible to notice a desire for leadership to inspire and positively influence school actors. The adherence process to the PEI Program is an excellent example of how school principals exercise leadership. To lead the school actors to vote in favor of the program, the principals presented the benefits each public would have with it, building a collective sense for the PEI. According to Zaccaro et al. (2001, quoted in Brest, 2011), this sensemaking process is decisive.

Nevertheless, what we could also find is that the desire to act as leaders is confronted to the complex reality of Brazilian public schools. As we have seen, the work routine of these professionals is challenging and sometimes requires a more managerial approach. A considerable part of school principals in Brazil work in vulnerable communities and, in addition, must deal with structural limitations since many schools lack different types of resources. In face of these conditions, exercising leadership becomes a challenge, since inspiring and influencing people is a more complex and time-consuming process. The hybrid aspect of the school principals practice,

combining elements of management and different leadership styles, is also verified in the literature (Brest, 2011; Yvon, 2019).

Despite the difficulties faced, it was possible to verify that school principals at the present act differently from the “cabinet principals” of the past. As the concepts evolved in the field of school administration (Gunter, 2019), so the practice did. In fact, we observe that the professionals have a more dialogic posture with the different school actors, exercising listening in the face of everyday situations and seeking collective solutions. In addition, the principals are aware of the social changes that imply a change in their practice and evaluate them as positive. All school principals interviewed are guided by the school’s educational objectives and, above all, by the students’ success.

In conclusion, school principals are fundamental actors in the educational process and the implementation of public policies locally. It is possible to observe changes in their practice over time. However, both time and reality frequently impose a gap between where we are and where we want to be. As limitations of this research, we list the short time of the observations *in loco* (only one day for each school principal) and the impossibility of considering the perception of other school actors, such as students and teachers. Besides that, it would also be interesting to analyze the practice of school principals in part-time schools.

Therefore, there is still much to investigate regarding the actual practice of school principals in Brazil and worldwide. This research opens the discussion to relevant research topics in the school management field. As noted, the nature of principals’ work is similar, even in different countries. In Latin America specifically and the Global South as a whole, it would be interesting to enhance comparative analyses of public policies regarding these professionals’ continuing training based on evidence of essential competencies for the function. Moreover, another interesting point to deepen is school principals’ sensemaking concerning public policies they implement locally. Then, expanding studies to other policies, especially mandatory ones, would be significant. Finally, it is crucial to understand school principals’ practice regarding recent themes little explored in the field, such as aspects of gender, race, and migration at school. These perspectives of research are relevant since school principals are recognized each day more as critical actors for any initiative in the school environment. Thus, supporting their work is fundamental for schools to become more significant spaces for the development of students.

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9. Annexes

Annex I - Interview grid

[English Version]

Introduction: i. Presentation of researcher and research; ii. Explanation about the organization of the interview; iii. Explanation about the anonymity of data; iv. Questions?	
Session: The journey Objectif : Open the dialogue creating a comfortable atmosphere.	
Questions	Supporting relaunches
Can you tell me about your journey as a professional in the educational area? (from the beginning to the position you occupy today).	- What is your background? (education) - For how long have you been school principal / principal adjunct? - What were your motivations when you decided to apply for this position?
Session: The daily work Objectif: Understand the actual work of the school principal on a daily basis.	
Questions	Supporting relaunches
What are the main challenges you face in your daily work as school principal?	- Nature of these challenges / problems ;
Can you give me an example of a concrete problem you had last week?	- How did you solve this problem? - With whom did you work to solve this problem?
What are the main demands you have as school principal on a daily basis?	- Type of demand and from whom (government, families, teachers, students, etc);
Can you give me an example of a concrete demand you had last week and how did you deal with it? (a demand that stood out for you)	- How did you prioritize? - How did you address this demand? - Did you work with someone else to address this demand?
Session: Full-time high school policy Objectif: Understand how the school principal manages the full-time high school implementation.	
Questions	Supporting relaunches
In regard to the implementation of this policy, what are the main challenges you face as school principal? Can you	- How did you solve this problem? - With whom did you work to solve this problem?

give an example of a concrete problem you had in this process?	
In this whole process, can you tell me about your relation with the Department of Education? For example, how was the last interaction you had with them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is the communication with them? (formal, informal, easy, difficult) - Normally, who contacts each other? (principal to the Department or vice-versa) Investigate the relation: supportive, pressure, top down, etc.
And what about your relation with the school community (teachers, parents, students)? Can you tell me, for example, how did you deal with them in a concrete situation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is the communication with them? (formal, informal, easy, difficult) - Normally, who contacts each other? - With whom do you cooperate more to solve your challenges/problems? Investigate the relation: tensioned, smooth, partnership, top down, etc.
Session: The role of school principal Objectif: Understand the personal/professional meaning the school principal attributes to his-her occupation.	
Questions	Supporting relaunches
In general, what do you think is your role as school principal?	- Has this role changed over time? (society)
What have been your main takeaways so far?	-
Conclusion Do you want to add anything else that we possibly haven't approached so far? Collect biographic information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender; - Age; - Race (according to IBGE); - Years/months in the position (in general). Thank for the interview.	

Source: Campos Cardoso (2023).

[Brazilian Portuguese Version]

Introdução i. Relembrar os objetivos da pesquisa; ii. Explicar sobre o desenvolvimento da entrevista (gravação, tempo, interrupção, etc); iii. Relembrar sobre o tratamento confidencial dos dados; iv. Dúvidas?	
Sessão: Trajetória individual Objetivo: Abrir o diálogo, criar uma atmosfera agradável e conhecer a trajetória.	
Pergunta	Relances
Você poderia me contar brevemente sobre o seu percurso profissional na área de educação? (desde o início da sua carreira, até a posição que você ocupa hoje).	- Graduação / pós graduação; - Quanto tempo na gestão escolar? - Motivações para atuar na gestão escolar.
Sessão: O trabalho na prática Objetivo: Compreender o trabalho real da direção escolar no dia-a-dia.	
Pergunta	Relances
Em relação ao seu trabalho cotidiano, quais são os seus principais desafios como diretora escolar?	- Natureza dos desafios; - Problemas;
Você pode me dar um exemplo concreto de, por exemplo, um problema que você teve que enfrentar essa semana?	- Como você resolveu esse problema? - Você trabalhou em conjunto com alguém para resolver esse problema?
Em relação ao seu dia-a-dia de trabalho como diretora escolar, quais são as suas principais demandas?	- Tipo de demanda; - Origem (sistema de ensino, famílias, professores, estudantes, etc); - Organização da equipe de trabalho.
Essa semana, por exemplo, você pode me dar um exemplo concreto de uma demanda que você teve e como você lidou com ela? (por exemplo, que tomou bastante do seu tempo / energia)	- Priorização; - Como endereçou essa demanda? - Você trabalhou em conjunto com alguém para encaminhar essa demanda?
Sessão: Política de Ensino Médio em Tempo Integral Objetivo: Compreender como a direção escolar lida com a implementação da política.	
Pergunta	Relances
Em relação à política de ensino médio em tempo integral, quais os principais desafios você enfrenta enquanto diretora no processo de implementação? Você pode me dar um exemplo de problema concreto que você teve durante esse processo?	- Como você resolveu esse problema? - Você trabalhou em conjunto com alguém para resolver esse problema?
Nesse processo de implementação, como é a sua relação com a Diretoria Regional de Ensino? Por exemplo, como foi a última interação entre você e a DRE?	- Como é a comunicação? (formal, informal, fácil, difícil) - Normalmente, de onde parte o contato? (da escola)

	para a DRE ou o contrário) - Natureza da relação: apoio, pressão, top down, etc.
E em relação à sua relação com a comunidade escolar (professores, famílias, estudantes)? Você pode me dar um exemplo de como você lidou com a comunidade escolar em uma situação concreta?	- Como é a comunicação? (formal, informal, fácil, difícil) - Normalmente, de onde parte o contato? - Com quem você mais coopera para resolver os desafios/problemas da escola? - Natureza da relação: tensão, tranquila, parceria, top down, etc.
Sessão: O papel da direção escolar Objetivo: Compreender o sentido que a direção escolar dá ao seu próprio papel e qual o estilo de liderança exerce.	
Pergunta	Relances
De modo geral, o que você acredita ser o seu papel enquanto diretora escolar?	- Essa função mudou com o tempo? (sociedade)
Quais foram os seus principais aprendizados nesta função até aqui?	-
Conclusão Você gostaria de acrescentar qualquer outra coisa que nós não abordamos até agora? Informações biográficas: - Gênero: - Idade: - Raça (segundo o IBGE): - Tempo de atuação na função (geral): Agradecer pelo tempo e disposição em participar dessa pesquisa.	

Source: Campos Cardoso (2023).

Annex II - Curriculum matrix of part-time high schools in the State of São Paulo

[English Version - Freely Translated]

MATRIX 3							
HIGH SCHOOL – PART-TIME - MORNING							
	AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE	CURRICULUM DISCIPLINES	WEEKLY CLASSES			TOTAL ANNUAL CLASSES	TOTAL ANNUAL HOURS
			1st YEAR	2nd YEAR	3rd YEAR		
BASIC GENERAL FORMATION	LANGUAGES AND ITS TECHNOLOGIES	PORTUGUESE	5	3	2	400	300
		ARTS	2	0	2	160	120
		PHYSICAL EDUCATION	2	0	2	160	120
		ENGLISH	2	0	2	160	120
	MATH AND ITS TECHNOLOGIES	MATH	5	3	2	400	300
	NATURE SCIENCES AND ITS TECHNOLOGIES	BIOLOGY	2	2	0	160	120
		PHYSICS	2	2	0	160	120
		CHEMISTRY	2	2	0	160	120
	APPLIED HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES	PHILOSOPHY	2	2	0	160	120
		GEOGRAPHY	2	2	0	160	120
		HISTORY	2	2	0	160	120
		SOCIOLOGY	2	2	0	160	120
	TOTAL BASIC GENERAL FORMATION			30	20	10	2400
FORMATIVE PATHS		LIFE PROJECT	2	1	2	200	150
		TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION	1	1	1	120	90
		ELECTIVES	2	0	2	160	120
		ENGLISH	0	2	0	80	60
		PHYSICAL EDUCATION	0	1	0	40	30
		FURTHER CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENT	0	10	20	1200	900
TOTAL FORMATIVE PATH IN THE SCHOOL SHIFT (PRESENTIAL)			5	15	25	1800	1350
OVERALL TOTAL OF WEEKLY CLASSES			35	35	35		
OVERALL TOTAL OF ANNUAL CLASSES			1400	1400	1400	4200	
OVERALL TOTAL OF ANNUAL HOURS			1050	1050	1050		3150

Source: Adapted from *Matriz Curricular do Ensino Médio para atribuição de aulas da 1ª e 2ª séries em 2022 e 3ª série em 2023 DIURNO*, SEDUC-SP, p. 6. Free translation.

[Brazilian Portuguese Version - Original Version]

MATRIZ 3							
ENSINO MÉDIO – TEMPO PARCIAL - DIURNO							
	ÁREAS DE CONHECIMENTO	COMPONENTES CURRICULARES	AULAS SEMANAIS			Total Aulas Anuais	Total Horas Anuais
			1ª série	2ª série	3ª série		
FORMAÇÃO GERAL BÁSICA	LINGUAGENS E SUAS TECNOLOGIAS	LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA	5	3	2	400	300
		ARTE	2	0	2	160	120
		EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA	2	0	2	160	120
		LÍNGUA INGLESA	2	0	2	160	120
	MATEMÁTICA E SUAS TECNOLOGIAS	MATEMÁTICA	5	3	2	400	300
	CIÊNCIAS DA NATUREZA E SUAS TECNOLOGIAS	BIOLOGIA	2	2	0	160	120
		FÍSICA	2	2	0	160	120
		QUÍMICA	2	2	0	160	120
	CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS E SOCIAIS APLICADAS	FILOSOFIA	2	2	0	160	120
		GEOGRAFIA	2	2	0	160	120
		HISTÓRIA	2	2	0	160	120
		SOCIOLOGIA	2	2	0	160	120
	TOTAL FORMAÇÃO GERAL BÁSICA			30	20	10	2400
ITINERÁRIO FORMATIVO		PROJETO DE VIDA	2	1	2	200	150
		TECNOLOGIA E INOVAÇÃO	1	1	1	120	90
		ELETIVAS	2	0	2	160	120
		LÍNGUA INGLESA	0	2	0	80	60
		EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA	0	1	0	40	30
		APROFUNDAMENTO CURRICULAR*	0	10	20	1200	900
TOTAL ITINERÁRIO FORMATIVO PRESENCIAL DENTRO DO TURNO			5	15	25	1800	1350
TOTAL GERAL DE AULAS SEMANAIS			35	35	35		
TOTAL GERAL DE AULAS ANUAIS			1400	1400	1400	4200	
TOTAL GERAL DE HORAS ANUAIS			1050	1050	1050		3150

Source: Matriz Curricular do Ensino Médio para atribuição de aulas da 1ª e 2ª séries em 2022 e 3ª série em 2023 DIURNO, SEDUC-SP, p. 6.

Annex III - Curriculum matrix of full-time high schools in the State of São Paulo

[English Version - Freely Translated]

NATIONAL COMMON BASE	AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE	CURRICULUM DISCIPLINES	YEAR/CLASSES			
			1ª	2ª	3ª	CH
	LANGUAGES	PORTUGUESE	5	5	6	640
		PHYSICAL EDUCATION	2	2	2	240
		ARTS	2	2	2	240
	MATH	MATH	5	5	6	640
	NATURE SCIENCES	CHEMISTRY	2	3	2	280
		PHYSICS	3	2	2	280
		BIOLOGY	2	2	3	280
	HUMAN SCIENCES	HISTORY	2	2	2	240
GEOGRAPHY		2	2	2	240	
PHILOSOPHY		2	2	2	240	
SOCIOLOGY		2	2	2	240	
TOTAL NATIONAL COMMON BASE			29	29	31	3.560
DIVERSIFIED PART OF THE CURRICULUM		MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE	2	2	2	240
		ELECTIVE DISCIPLINES	2	2	2	240
		SCIENCES PRACTICE	4	4	0	320
TOTAL OF DIVERSIFIED PART			8	8	4	800
COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES		STUDIES ORIENTATION	4	2	2	320
		LIFE PROJECT	2	2	0	160
		ACADEMIC PREPARATION	0	2	4	240
		WORLD OF LABOR	0	0	2	80
TOTAL COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES			6	6	8	800
OVERALL TOTAL OF WORKLOAD			43	43	43	5.160

Source: Adapted from *Informações Gerais do Programa Integral*, SEDUC-SP, p. 6. Free translation.

[Brazilian Portuguese Version - Original Version]

	ÁREAS DE CONHECIMENTO	COMPONENTES CURRICULARES	Séries/Aula			
			1ª	2ª	3ª	CH
BASE NACIONAL COMUM	LINGUAGENS	Língua Portuguesa	5	5	6	640
		Educação Física	2	2	2	240
		Arte	2	2	2	240
	MATEMÁTICA	Matemática	5	5	6	640
	CIÊNCIAS DA NATUREZA	Química	2	3	2	280
		Física	3	2	2	280
		Biologia	2	2	3	280
	CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS	História	2	2	2	240
		Geografia	2	2	2	240
		Filosofia	2	2	2	240
		Sociologia	2	2	2	240
TOTAL DA BASE NACIONAL COMUM			29	29	31	3.560
PARTE DIVERSIFICADA	Língua Estrangeira Moderna	2	2	2	240	
	Disciplinas Eletivas	2	2	2	240	
	Pratica de Ciências	4	4	0	320	
TOTAL DA PARTE DIVERSIFICADA			8	8	4	800
ATIVIDADES COMPLEMENTARES	Orientação de Estudo	4	2	2	320	
	Projeto de Vida	2	2	0	160	
	Preparação Acadêmica	0	2	4	240	
	Mundo do Trabalho	0	0	2	80	
TOTAL DAS ATIVIDADES COMPLEMENTARES			6	6	8	800
TOTAL GERAL DA CARGA HORÁRIA			43	43	43	5.160

Source: *Informações Gerais do Programa Integral*, SEDUC-SP, p. 6.

Annex IV - Duties of Principals and Deputy Principals according to Complementary Laws n° 1.164/2012 and n° 1.191/2012

I. Duties of Principals
<p>I - Plan, implement and articulate all activities aimed at developing the pedagogical content, didactic method and school management;</p> <p>II - Coordinate the elaboration of the action plan, articulating it with the teachers' action programs and the students' life projects;</p> <p>III - Manage human and material resources for carrying out the diversified part of the curriculum and tutoring activities for students, considering the social context of the respective school and the students' life projects;</p> <p>IV - Establish, together with the Pedagogical Coordinators, the necessary strategies for the development of youth protagonism, among other school activities, including through partnerships, submitting them to the competent bodies;</p> <p>V - Monitor and guide all the activities of the teaching, technical and administrative staff of the respective school;</p> <p>VI - Ensure compliance with the work regime of the teaching staff dealt with in this supplementary law;</p> <p>VII - Organize, among the members of the teaching staff of the respective school, the replacement of teachers, in similar areas, in their legal and temporary impediments;</p> <p>VIII - Plan and promote actions aimed at clarifying the school's pedagogical model with families and guardians, with particular attention to the life project;</p> <p>IX – Monitor and evaluate the didactic and pedagogical production of the teachers of the respective school;</p> <p>X – Systematize and register the experiences and specific educational and management practices of the respective school;</p> <p>XI – Act as a disseminator and multiplier agent for the school's pedagogical model, its educational and management practices, in accordance with the parameters set by the central bodies of the Secretariat of Education;</p> <p>XII - Decide, within the scope of its competence, on omitted cases.</p> <p>Single Paragraph: The Principal may delegate duties to the Deputy Principal.</p>

II. Duties of Deputy-Principals
<p>I - Assist the Principal in coordinating the preparation of the action plan;</p> <p>II - Monitor and systematize the development of life projects;</p> <p>III - Mediate conflicts in the school environment;</p> <p>IV - Guide, when necessary, the student, family, or guardians regarding the search for social protection services;</p> <p>V - Take over the management of the school during periods when the Principal is acting as a disseminator and multiplier agent of the school's pedagogical model;</p> <p>VI - Elaborate your action program with the objectives, targets, and learning outcomes to be achieved.</p>

Source: Adapted from the Human Resources Tutorial, *Programa Ensino Integral*, SEDUC-SP, pp. 4-5. Free translation.

Annex V - Link to access the transcriptions of interviews

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EfRjbu_tCCS4cWNPQAGA5vN6hGA80hgl?usp=sharing>