

## A DECADE OF WORK IN THE MUNICIPAL EDUCATION SYSTEM: EXPERIENCE REPORT

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### ABSTRACT

This experience report aims to present the professional practices of psychologists who were members of the first multidisciplinary team of a municipal education system located in the North of the State of Rio de Janeiro throughout its first decade of operation (2011-2021). In order of events, the experiences and challenges of this pioneering service are presented in the events order. Likewise, the construction of an institutional mapping and the inauguration of an Institutional Duty service are reported, through which it was possible to determine school inclusion and student retention as scopes of psychological interventions. As a result, it was realized that psychologists must be aware of the mistaken expectations about their professional duties and the discourses that blame teachers and students, so that they can act to promote quality public education for all in partnership with other actors in the educational process field.

**Keywords:** school psychology; psychologist's performance; school inclusion

### Una década de actuación en la red municipal de educación: relato de experiencia

#### RESUMEN

En este relato de experiencia se tiene por objetivo presentar las prácticas profesionales de psicólogos integrantes del primer equipo multidisciplinar de una red municipal de educación ubicada en el Norte del Estado de Rio de Janeiro a lo largo de su primera década de actuación (2011-2021). En el orden de los sucesos, se presentan las vivencias y los desafíos de ese servicio pionero. Del mismo modo, se relatan la construcción de un mapeo institucional y la inauguración de un servicio de Plantón Institucional, por intermedio de los cuales fue posible determinar la inclusión escolar y la permanencia de los estudiantes como alcance de las intervenciones psicológicas. Como resultado, se percibió que los psicólogos deben estar atentos a las expectativas equivocadas sobre sus atribuciones profesionales y a discursos que culpabilizan profesores y alumnos, para que puedan actuar en la promoción de una educación pública de calidad para todos, en asociación con los demás actores del proceso educacional.

**Palabras clave:** psicología escolar; actuación del psicólogo; inclusión escolar

### Uma década de atuação na rede municipal de educação: relato de experiência

#### RESUMO

Este relato de experiência objetiva apresentar as práticas profissionais de psicólogos integrantes da primeira equipe multidisciplinar de uma rede municipal de educação localizada no Norte do Estado do Rio de Janeiro ao longo de sua primeira década de atuação (2011-2021). Na ordem dos acontecimentos, apresentam-se as vivências e os desafios desse serviço pioneiro. Do mesmo modo, relatam-se a construção de um mapeamento institucional e a inauguração de um serviço de Plantão Institucional, por meio dos quais foi possível determinar a inclusão escolar e a permanência dos estudantes como escopos das intervenções psicológicas. Como resultado, percebeu-se que os psicólogos devem estar atentos às expectativas equivocadas sobre suas atribuições profissionais e aos discursos que culpabilizam professores e alunos, para que possam atuar na promoção de uma educação pública de qualidade para todos, em parceria com os demais atores do processo educacional.

**Palavras-chave:** psicología escolar; atuação do psicólogo; inclusão escolar

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## INTRODUCTION

Upon completing a decade of working as a school psychologist on the first multidisciplinary<sup>1</sup> team of a municipal education system in the North of the State of Rio de Janeiro, I was overcome by the desire to remember my professional career. In the midst of so many challenges that have arisen in the field of Education, I felt anguish and, therefore, decided to look back with the aim of finding meaning for new achievements.

Casting a critical eye on what has been experienced, considering that “psychologists need to think about their thinking”, as suggested by Patto (2000, p. 75), I identified a set of successful practices that deserve to be discussed and made visible, especially at a time in which professionals from different regions of Brazil fight for compliance with Law No. 13,935, of 2019, which provides for the provision of Psychology and Social Service services in public Basic Education networks (Law 13.935, 2019).

In this process of revisiting the paths taken, I found that, among many attempts, interventions undertaken promoted significant changes in this context in which psychologists work. It is worth mentioning that many of the practices reported here had the support of important partners: social workers who also make up the multidisciplinary team at the Department of Education. In this sense, even though the work was built in continuous dialogue with other professionals who work in Education, considering the specificities of each category, the objective of this experience report is to present the main practices carried out by psychologists in the face of the most recurrent complaints in their work context throughout the first decade of operation (2011-2021). This experience began with institutional mapping, unfolding in the creation of an institutional duty service that enabled numerous interventions to promote school inclusion.

This report may encourage countless reflections on the current challenges faced by school psychologists, as well as on the scenarios that can be experienced by other professional categories that frequently interact with Education.

### REPORT: RESIGNING EXPECTATIONS

In 2010, with the holding of the first public competition for Education professionals in a municipality in the North Fluminense region in the state of Rio de

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<sup>1</sup>The first multidisciplinary team in this municipal education system was formed in 2011, after holding a public competition for Education professionals. Initially, this team included psychologists, social workers, physiotherapists, music therapists and nutritionists. As of 2013, only psychologists and social workers remained, as the other professional categories began to take on other work fronts in the municipal government.

Janeiro, the multidisciplinary team of the Department of Education was inaugurated. When the work began, the great concern expressed in meetings with municipal managers was the low result of the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb) of the education system, as a result of the Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb). The Department of Education proposed that the new technical professionals draw up a work plan that would effectively result in improving the quality of Education in the municipality and raising indicators, according to the parameters of the Ministry of Education.

It would not be possible, in this sense, to think about interventions without previously carrying out mapping and reflection on institutional aspects, as suggested by Marinho-Araujo and Almeida (2010). To this end, we started from a socially referenced conception of quality, which encompasses intra- and extra-school factors (Dourado, Oliveira, & Santos, 2007). Based on these references, a script for observing institutional and interpersonal relations in the daily lives of schools was drawn up. As visits to the city's schools took place, it was possible to observe and talk to the school community. This work allowed the identification of many intervening factors, among which the following stood out: problems in the architectural structure of most schools, precariousness of public transport within the municipality (which caused changes in school opening hours and the duration of classes), creation of multigrade classes and teacher turnover due to working conditions. In addition to these, other factors were also noticed, such as the conceptions of teaching and learning marked by the blaming of students and teachers regarding low Ideb, the lack of spaces for discussion and reflection about educational processes and the presence of centralizing forces in the school management that, together, interfered with student learning and the functioning of institutions.

In these first visits to the school units, the team noticed that expectations about the school psychologist's work focused on the adaptation of students who had low academic performance and/or age-grade distortion or who transgressed social norms. Furthermore, these professionals were expected to change the behavior patterns of families judged to be dysfunctional.

Given the discrepancy between the expectations of municipal system managers and the theoretical-methodological conceptions of professionals from the multidisciplinary team, institutional mapping was not properly considered by them. Although frustrated, psychologists realized the need to create new work fronts, without losing sight of the profession's ethical and political commitment. After many study group meetings, team discussions and supervision by more experienced professionals, inspired by Machado (2007), they decided to inaugurate the Institutional Duty of the multidisciplinary team.

### **Institutional duty and referrals: a new phase**

Knowing the reality of most schools in the city, as a result of the institutional mapping carried out, the professionals created a space for dialogue between the multidisciplinary team and the school communities through the Institutional Duty Station. In the space of the Department of Education, psychologists were available to accommodate the demands presented by members of the municipal education system, including parents and guardians. After creating this space for dialogue, the team began to receive complaints and referral forms of different natures. In this way, after receiving complaints, they went to meet the school community in different locations in the municipality, especially in the interior, where access was more difficult.

Initially, the most recurrent demands referred to students with disabilities and/or Pervasive Developmental Disorders who began to attend regular Elementary School classrooms in the municipality following the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education; students in situations of social vulnerability, with complaints of transgressive behavior and those who presented considerable age-grade distortion and students referred for medical and/or clinical psychological care, under suspicion of some pathology or psychological suffering involved. Although there have been many changes in this context of action, it can be said that the aforementioned complaints have been repeated over the last ten years.

Pressures and tensions also occurred on Institutional Duty, and psychologists were often asked to meet demands contrary to professional ethics, such as stifle criticism and demands from the school community. Confident in the importance of problematizing action in the community, professionals from the multidisciplinary team sought to achieve greater clarity in their professional responsibilities, so that they could truly contribute to education as a practice of freedom, from a Freirean perspective (Freire, 2019). In this sense, at the time, technical references for the psychologists work in Basic Education (Conselho Federal de Psicologia, 2013) helped to think about the professionals' roles.

Considering the complaints involved, the next step was to build intervention strategies. In this process, one of the biggest challenges was executing quality work with a relatively small team, since demands from different school units arose at the same time. Likewise, with the development of the actions, it was realized that the great challenge was the inclusion and quality retention of students who did not conform to the expectations of Education professionals. This has been the main theme of the team's work, on which many possibilities for intervention have been built. These, in fact, could not be recorded in full in this report, due to the need for their delimitation.

### **Possibilities of intervention: inclusion and permanence**

Ten years ago, most professionals at schools in the municipal education system were having their first experiences with students with disabilities. At first, the school teams were very unsure about what they could do and how they should act with this public. In this scenario, many family members were unable to enroll their children and adolescents in municipal schools that were not yet aware of their rights to access regular schools. This reality reached the multidisciplinary team vehemently through the Institutional Duty and required many interventions.

In the different schools in the municipality, there were fantasies about learning for people with disabilities that involved fears that did little to overcome architectural, pedagogical and attitudinal barriers. It was necessary to invest in dialogue with professionals about the topic of school inclusion, which was still little known to them at that time. In this process, it was necessary to learn together, work in partnership with the Special Education Coordination, be present at training meetings with teachers, support initiatives favorable to the topic and contribute knowledge that would provide reflection about prejudices and the stigma attributed to differences.

Along with the demands regarding school inclusion there were requests for reports and opinions to be drawn up. From this perspective, some professionals believed that, for school inclusion to happen, the diagnostic report was essential to guide pedagogical actions, especially with children who had difficulties in the learning process. The professionals analyzed the referrals and, meeting the school community, identified that many social issues were hidden and treated as biological and psychological problems. Although each case was treated according to its peculiarities, one of the most important strategies was the construction of partnerships with other professional categories that worked in schools – educational psychologists, pedagogues and educational counselors. They had frequent contact with teachers and received their referrals first-hand, which is why they were essential for building an effective dialogue against the medicalization of school life.

Furthermore, events about this topic stand out, with the collaboration of professionals from the areas of Education, Health and Social Assistance. This dialogue with representatives of the health network and other institutions that provided specialized care was very important so that students who needed therapeutic resources could count on the necessary support to achieve a better quality of life.

The multidisciplinary team also gave teachers a voice at the Department of Education, fighting for better living conditions for students with disabilities and also

for those who were in a situation of social vulnerability and required professionals to take a contextualized look at their living conditions and of their families. Some of these families were insecure, did not know their rights, nor could they believe in the benefits of their children's participation in regular school.

In dialogue with communities and observing the presence of cultural plurality, it was possible to realize that some families did not go to school because they feared this encounter. They brought stories of failure, situations of debasement and social ills that distanced them from education as a possibility for social advancement. Often, their basic needs for food and shelter were threatened. Knowing such realities caused a lot of anguish, because it implied assuming responsibilities and mobilizing the Public Power to meet the rights of these subjects. To this end, psychologists sought references that would allow them to think about the practice of Psychology and its social and historical commitment, as suggested by Patto (2000).

Given the experience and the advances perceived in the present, it can be said that the fight for access to regular schools has transformed into the work for the right to a quality stay for students with disabilities. In times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the even greater effort against exclusion, against stigmatization and against blaming students and families from the popular classes continues, which has resulted in the active involvement of the multidisciplinary team in public policies, in uncompromising defense of Human Rights and unconditional support for the democratic management of schools.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this first decade of activity, it is important to say that guaranteeing the right to education requires countless dialogues. Along with scientific knowledge and professional ethical principles, permanent dialogue among peers, teamwork and intersectorality were pillars that supported the actions developed by psychologists, who, with everyday experience, recognized the interdependence of social rights.

With the experience arising from this action, it was clear that there is still much to question about the concepts of difference and disability present in public

policies and educational practices, as suggested by Kranz and Campos (2020). Faced with expectations and demands, it was necessary to listen carefully to the subjects, dialogue and study a lot, so that it was possible to build work possibilities, referenced in research and ethical principles of the profession.

The path taken is full of attempts and frustrations, but it is believed that Psychology has a lot to contribute to quality education for all. Therefore, it is believed that the implementation of Law No. 13,935 (2019) could bring new perspectives to Basic Education, especially if professionals are engaged in an unconditional fight for education for all, which emancipates minorities and respects and promotes diversity.

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