ARTICLES

School bureaucracy and reproduction of stigmas in the students and their families [1] [2] [3] [4]

Burocracia escolar e reprodução de estigmas sobre os estudantes e suas famílias

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Abstract

This article analyzes data from research with 23 managers of municipal schools in Rio de Janeiro that investigated the relationship between educational bureaucracy and families during their children's enrollment processes. In the in-depth interviews, we mapped managers' perceptions of students and their families, partly oriented by individual and collective stigmas. We will describe the typology we proposed to interpret this set of stigmas, the application of the typology in the analysis of the interviews, and argue about the bureaucrats' actions guided by these stigmas. Our results show that the bureaucratic actions tend to reproduce social inequalities of origin and produce new forms of inequality within schools.

Keywords: school, stigma, educational policies implementation, educational systems, reproduction of inequalities

Resumo

O artigo analisa os dados de uma pesquisa realizada com 23 gestores de escolas municipais do Rio de Janeiro, com o objetivo de investigar a relação da burocracia educacional com as famílias no decorrer dos processos de matrícula dos filhos. Mapearam-se, nas entrevistas em profundidade, as percepções dos gestores com relação aos estudantes e suas famílias, em parte orientadas por estigmas individuais e coletivos. Serão apresentados a tipologia proposta para interpretar esse conjunto de estigmas; a aplicação da tipologia na análise das entrevistas; e os argumentos quanto às ações dos burocratas, motivadas por tais estigmas. Os dados indicam que tais ações tendem a reproduzir desigualdades sociais de origem e a produzir novas formas de desigualdade no interior das escolas.

Palavras-chave: *escola, estigma, implementação de políticas educacionais, sistemas educacionais, reprodução de desigualdades*

1- Introduction

The classic debate about the equalization of educational opportunities is structured with (or against) James Coleman (1966). The author's and his collaborators' general thesis that there would be a direct correlation between socioeconomic profile and school performance was never fully overcome. Other studies conducted since then in Western countries[5] indicate that this relationship is meaningful, which allow us to state that families with higher socioeconomic and cultural level tend to have better school performances.

In the 1960s and 1970s, this thesis ended up reducing the positive expectations concerning the equalization of goods and social services that perceived the school as one of the central institutions responsible for promoting social mobility. Data pointed out that school was not significant in explaining the differences in performance caused by students' family backgrounds.

We should highlight other approaches with converging results, more specifically, the works of Pierre Bourdieu in France and the reproduction theoreticians. Though with theoretical differences from Coleman, the scholars associated with this approach, in general, argue that

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[5] For a deeper debate on the reception trajectory and criticism of the study coordinated by Coleman, see Gamoran and Long (2006).

children with a lower family background tend to have lower performance and probability of reaching long educational trajectories due to the lack of capitals needed for schooling (Bourdieu & 2001; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992; Coleman, 1966), or the reproduction actions present within schools[6].

The sociological fatalism brought by the readings of Coleman and Bourdieu's works was relativized by studies that can be grouped under the classification "research on school effectiveness"[7]. Summing up, these studies dialogue with Coleman's thesis but affirm that schools, when recognizing their students' socioeconomic and cultural differences, can pedagogically act to reduce students' pedagogical differences.

These studies argue that intra-school factors allow schools to promote the learning of all children. Among those factors are school environment, professional leadership, shared objectives and visions, focus on teaching and learning, high expectations, progress monitoring, explicit teaching and objectives, students' rights and responsibilities, home-school partnership, and an organization targeting learning[8]. In this article, our interest is the high expectations for students' learning. This is a crucial discussion because we can say that expectations guide actions; when they are low, there is a tendency to create less efficient actions for students' everyday learning in schools[9].

In the specific case of Brazil, as shown by Rosistolato et al. (2018), contextual readings of the cultural and socioeconomic differences among children studying in public schools tend to guide the actions of teachers and managers. The notion of "school reality" is recurrent in education professionals' discourse and guides the pedagogical actions of adequacy between what should be taught and what is offered to students.

We perceived in our study that the implementation of enrollment policies in the schools of Rio de Janeiro is organized based on a series of views on the children and their families, including stigmas related to school and/or social issues. Stigmas are associated with students' social place and performance during schooling (Rosistolato et al., 2019). The identification of

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[6] The idea of "reproduction theories" works as an encompassing category for authors from relatively different traditions. However, it starts from the principle that the school tends to reproduce social inequalities of origin instead of combating them. For a general understanding of the authors classified as members of the "theoretical-reproduction" theses, see Camargo et al. (2017).

[7] See Brooke and Soares (2008).

[8] See Brooke and Soares (2008) and Sammons (2008).

[9] This thesis is already seen in Merton (1968) and Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968).

these stigmas made us think about a more specific discussion, aiming to contribute to the debate consolidated in the approaches of Coleman, Bourdieu, the reproduction theoreticians, and the discussion on school effectiveness.

Our contribution articulates the symbolic interactionism, a set of sociological theories that intend to analyze *face-to-face* relationships. We mainly sought in Goffman (1975) the tools needed to understand the interactions established between school managers, families, and students[10]. According to the author, stigma is a condition experienced by individuals (or a group of individuals) classified as inapt for full social acceptance. In this case, we point out that full school acceptance would be the enrollment in school and the understanding that all students – regardless of their social and family origin – could learn all the school contents defined by the curriculum. During the interviews with the managers of municipal schools, they mentioned the "children nobody wants" and the "schools nobody wants". A first insight into individual and institutional stigmas in the enrollment policy implementation in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

We argue that children individually and/or in groups can be fated to not learn even before starting their studies. Managers bring their perceptions about the students based on a set of "virtual social identities", using Goffman's (1975) terms.

Within the educational processes, these identities incorporate a certain profile of students or families unable to learn. This verdict takes place even before children join the school. The interviews focused on school enrollment, and, at this moment, there were already reflections on the impossibility of individual students or groups learning or finishing their schooling. The virtual social identities consolidate themselves as elements guiding the actions and face-to-face interactions established between managers, teachers, families, and children[11]. This argument follows *pari passu* the knowledge accumulated in the debate on family-school relationships in the sociology of education. Thereby, our more direct contribution is the

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[10] A group of studies inspired or discussing Goffman's work also constitutes our theoretical background. In this article, we will describe them in detail. For more information, consult Marsh and Noguera (2018), Lafleur and Srivastava (2019), Scherer (2016). See also the work organized by Jacobsen (2010) and Smith's (2006) book focused on the specificities of Goffman's works.

[11] Costa (2020) corroborates our arguments when mapping the labeling and stigmatization processes experienced by children during childhood education. The author conducts ethnographic observations and interviews, stressing the representations and teachers' actions concerning children from different socioeconomic and cultural profiles. In the analyzed school, one of the social beliefs was that not all children will have linear school trajectories and will finish their education. At the interactional level, such perceptions produce stigmas and labels that create pedagogical actions that will not equitably attend to every child at this educational level.

description, and interpretation of games played on the stage and the backstage – as proposed by Goffman (1975) – developed during a bureaucratic procedure, such as school enrollment[12].

As we will show, there are specific configurations in which labels, stigmas, and general perceptions about students and their families come into the scene and correlate with the direct actions of bureaucrats. The bureaucrats described all this scenario during the in-depth interviews, and later we observed it in the scope of more punctual investigations, guided by the general hypothesis we proposed based on the analysis of the material produced in this research[13].

In the following sections, we present the enrollment policy in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the discussion about management discretion and the stigmatization of the students and their families, the methodology, and the taxonomy of the stigmas built from the analysis of the interviews with school managers.

Summing up, the managers start to relate with the children even before knowing them, beginning to reproduce in the level of the pedagogical actions,[14] the expectations built through social representations and stigmas. The data allows us to perceive that the stigmas and conservative environment are reified, as well as to notice that the managers' discourses are grounded by the recognition of the social place occupied by the school units they run.

2 – The enrollment policy and bureaucratic actions

According to the legislation between de 2015 and 2017, when we conducted the interviews[15], the families who wish to enroll their children for the first time in the municipal system should ask for a place through the internet in an online system called *Matrícula Digital*. Those already enrolled, but wished to change schools, should ask for an internal transfer using the same system during enrollment.

In the municipal system investigated, there are schools attending the complete "fundamental education", those only the first segment (elementary school from Year 1 to 5) and

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[12] For a debate on the contemporaneity of Goffman's study, see Jacobsen (2010).

[13] See mainly Costa (2020) and Almeida (2019).

[14] We understand the enrollment procedures as pedagogical actions involving decisions related to the educational system and each school unit.

[15] Legislation at the time: Portaria E/SUBG/CP n.º 21, de 5 de novembro de 2009; Resolução SME n.º 1363, de 19 de outubro de 2015; Resolução SME n.º 1428, de 24 de outubro de 2016; Resolução SME n.º 25, de 24 de outubro de 2017 (Rio de Janeiro, 2017).

those attending the second segment (middle school from Year 6 to 9)[16]. In these cases, there is a relocation procedure for students to move from one segment to another, changing schools. Elementary schools formally articulate with middle schools from the same *Coordenadoria Regional de Educação* - CRE to relocate their students in groups. The parents who do not agree to relocate their children to the indicated middle school can ask for a place in another school, during the online enrollment period or directly in the desired school, after the end of the period.

The schools in the municipal system have varied reputations and performances, which can influence families' choices. Hence, some schools tend to be more demanded, while "surplus" places exist in others. Studies have identified some strategies families use to choose and access their desired schools, which do not guarantee the school initially chosen (Costa & Koslinski, 2011; Rosistolato et al., 2016). To understand this phenomenon, we need to understand the official guidelines of *Secretaria Municipal de Educação* - SME for the enrollment processes and identify the actions of the education bureaucracy[17] responsible for these procedures, mainly in the interactions with students' families.

The legislation does not specify the procedures of enrollment, transfer, and relocation when there is more demand than the number of places. There are also no specifications regarding the organization of student transfer in groups, in the case of relocation, nor how schools should articulate themselves to transfer and receive the relocated students. The official documents determine that the CREs and the school management should guarantee students' permanence in the following educational phase in another school, defining a deadline for so. Nonetheless, there are no guidelines or determinations on the organization criteria among the schools to implement this process. Without regulation, the managers find "gaps" to make decisions following their criteria, evaluating each case (Almeida, 2019).

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[16] Out of the 1,543 schools in the system, 103 are only elementary schools, 130 are only middle schools, and 768 attend more than one segment. Data from SME website: http://www.rio.rj.gov.br/web/sme/educacao-em-numeros. Acesso em 21 de setembro de 2021.

[17] The definition of "educational bureaucracy" is based on the concept drawn by Weber (1999). He affirms that modern bureaucracy is marked out by guiding principles. Summing up, there is a fixed division of activities, the powers of command are distributed, and the regular fulfilment of bureaucratic duties depends on hiring technical staff. In this sense, school managers and workers are bureaucrats. They are permanent school employees, were admitted through a public exam, and later elected for a mandate. The Law establishes all mandate rules, including their term and possible actions. Contemporary literature points out the existence of levels of discretionary actions in any and every bureaucratic process (Lipsky, 1980). As we will point out in this article, these gaps for discretionary actions are present in the regulation of the actions of Rio de Janeiro educational bureaucracy. The "educational bureaucracy" is used as an encompassing category, which includes teachers who are managers and technical staff that often assume bureaucratic roles related to management.

To Lipsky (1980), the lower the policy regulation, the greater the discretionary power of the bureaucracy dealing with the public. Discretionary power is the freedom and autonomy to interpret and adapt the rules and make decisions. The greater the power to act, the greater the tendency to act under the influence of perceptions, personal criteria and interests, convenience, and exchange of favors (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). Considering this, the educational bureaucracy, more specifically school managers, have high discretionary power due to the weak regulation of enrollment processes. Their actions can favor or disfavor the families, depending on the interests related to the profile of students desirable for the school.

Studies held in the education system analyzed point out the existence of informal enrollment criteria led by the educational bureaucracy, interacting with the families, which guide students' school trajectories. Therefore, managers directly act in the decisions that define the occupation of places. (Bruel, 2014; Carvalho, 2014; Rosistolato et al., 2016). Authors like Costa and Koslinski (2011) showed the existence of a "hidden quasi-market" in the municipal system of Rio de Janeiro, when identifying the mechanisms used by schools to select the "desirable" student profile, favoring the maintenance or improvement of their reputation.

Rosistolato et al.'s (2019) most recent research deepened the actions of educational bureaucrats during students' enrollment and relocation. They observed varied interpretations and implementations of the enrollment laws. Depending on the position, power level, and legitimacy of the management, it is possible to decide which students will be enrolled even if the legislation and computerized system do not explicitly allow this.

Almeida (2019) noticed several criteria that benefited certain families in the processes of enrollment and relocation, concluding that the bureaucracy judges and builds identities for the families and their children, guiding their actions. The stigmatization of families occurs mainly in the interaction moment with the managers, in the face-to-face relationship (Goffman, 1981). According to Pires et al. (2018), interactions build and reproduce moral categories. The bureaucrats categorize the public between those who deserve the service and those who do not. Their decisions take "a dimension of identity classification, whose result interferes in the process of user's social inclusion or exclusion" (p.257).

Managers' discretionary actions directly impacted the structure of educational opportunities as they defined trajectories of school success and failure, depending on the profile of the families and their children and the access to the municipal education system, since

childhood education. Understanding the perceptions, conceptions, and justifications that guide the actions of the education bureaucracy workers is vital, working with the hypothesis that the stigmas associated with students and their families are vital to understanding these agents' actions.

3 – Methodology

The *Secretaria Municipal de Educação do Rio de Janeiro* (SME- Municipal Secretary of Education) has 11 *Coordenadorias Regionais de Educação* (CRE- Regional Secretaries of Education)[18]. We conducted in-depth interviews with the management teams of 23 schools and 9 CRE. We could not encompass all CREs due to field limitations, specifically managers' refusal to participate. We selected schools based on their performances in external learning evaluations conducted by INEP, and the *Secretaria Municipal de Educação do Rio de Janeiro*, as well as the schools' reputation in their territory. First, we would work with schools in opposition duos, by performance (high *versus* low) and reputation (good *versus* bad). However, we faced constant refusals in the work field, mostly from schools with high performance and good reputations. Therefore, we opted to interview school managers who were as close as possible to the originally-defined profile and accepted to participate in the study. This procedure led to adjustments in the original qualitative sample but, as they were schools in the same system and guided by the same enrollment regulations, it was possible to make the comparisons foreseen in the project, considering the specificities of each school and manager interviewed.

The interviews with the managers aimed to understand how the dialogue with the families occurred during the enrollment, transfer, and relocation processes and their regulation and organization, mainly when the demand was more significant than the offer of places. This allowed us to identify several perceptions, expectations, and stigmas related to families.

The school researched have Social Economic Statuses (SES) in levels III, IV, and V, indicating some equivalence level in the socioeconomic characteristics of the students and their

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[18] CREs are part of the bureaucracy of the Municipal Education System. In the organization chart, they are under SME. They coordinate different numbers of schools distributed in all neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro.

families[19]. We selected managers of schools with relatively equivalent profiles because, though considering all the influences of the SES profiles in the relationships developed between families and schools, we understood that other labeling and stigmatization configurations are relatively independent of students' SES.

We proposed an analytical methodology for this article involving quantitative and qualitative procedures. The first step was to quantify and classify all references to the families and students. Considering that the managers are distributed in schools in all regions of the city, we understand that comparing the references to the children and their families would directly contribute to the comparative analysis we wish to accomplish about managers' perceptions – inserted in different regions of the city – about the students enrolled in the schools they run. Besides the quantitative approach, we qualified all the interviews, allowing us to produce a taxonomic analysis of the senses and justifications associated with managers' perceptions of the students and their families.

Table 1 presents the schools that participated in the research, the number of times the managers mentioned families, and their positive or negative classification. Some lines were not classified in one category or another because they were understood as neutral, i.e., narratives about families without positive or negative connotations. We have opted to leave them out of this table, as they were not the focus of our discussion. They were generic references with no evaluation weight. Therefore, we cannot compare them with positive or negative references in analytical terms.

Our main argument is that part of these representations – those grounded on labels and stigmas – corroborate the construction of types idealized by students and families and guide managers' actions during the enrollment process. In prospective terms, the managers believe

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[19] The indicator of Socioeconomic Status (SES, in Portuguese, *Indicador de Nível Socioeconômico* -INSE), created by the *Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira* (INEP), works with data from questionnaires applied to students in SAEB (the Evaluation System of K-12 Education). The differences among levels III, IV, and V refer to consumer goods, like freezer, computer, and car. There are also educational differences. The guardians of most students in level III and IV schools have an incomplete elementary or middle school education and/or are high school graduates. Students from level V schools have guardians who are middle school graduates or even have a higher education diploma.

the students would have successful or failing trajectories, justifying their beliefs based on the set of these representations.

Table 1.

Schools and mentions to families.

Municipal Schools[20]	Total	Negative	Positive
Pedra Azul	22	16	6
Lápis Lazúli	22	18	4
Diamante	18	7	11
Âmbar	18	10	8
Azurita	14	5	9
Turmalina	11	8	3
Topázio	11	8	3
Jade	11	5	8
Esmeralda	10	4	6
Água Marinha	10	7	3
Citrino	10	7	3
Cristal	9	7	2
Rubi	9	6	3
Turquesa	9	6	3
Safira	7	6	1
Granada	7	3	4
Opala	7	5	2
Pedra do Sol	5	5	0
Alexandrita	5	1	4
Ágata	5	1	4
Ametista	4	2	2
Malaquita	1	1	0
Pérola	1	0	1

The analysis of students' families mentions brought up some interpretative challenges. Initially, we started with a test with a classical variable in the sociology of education: parents' educational level. Hypothetically, families with lower educational levels would be less desirable to teachers and managers. It would be plausible to suppose that, in these schools, managers made fewer negative mentions to families than in those whose parents were more schooled.

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[20] School names are fictional.

This did not happen. We have found equivalent percentages of negative and positive mentions regarding families in schools attending families with higher and lower educational levels.

The scenario presented by the data displaced us to a qualitative analysis of family mentions, seeking to understand the senses given by the managers. We do not disregard families' socioeconomic variables and understand they have the heuristic potential to interpret labels and stigmas. Nevertheless, as we will show, there are elements that, though sometimes related to objective socioeconomic variables, result from interactions between managers and families. The proximities and distances in these interactions build and feed the stigmas that will also contribute to producing self-fulfilling prophecies regarding students' trajectories. We did not intend to draw an analysis based on the construction of mutually excluding variables, nor were we based on a causal model. We have produced the typologies and sought, based on the comparison among them, connections of meaning that articulate perceptions, labels, and stigmas as guiding elements of managers' actions[21].

Below, we present the results of the processes of quantification, the proposed taxonomy typology, and our analyses.

4 – Perceptions, expectations, and stigmas about the families and students

We present the typology in Table 2, describing the types of families built after analyzing the interviews with the managers. The four types present opposite family models: families with a high socioeconomic level and high expectations and Families with a low socioeconomic level and/or low expectations; active families in the schooling processes and/or school spaces and inactive ones.

We point out that three of the analyzed types are family models, which are a consensus among managers. They wish or do not wish these families in the schools. Nonetheless, the 'active families' is a non-consensus type. While some managers desire them, others repel them,

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[21] In Weberian terms, our data have limitations that stop us from moving from the interpretation related to the connections of meaning toward any causal explanation. The first moment of analysis allowed us to create hypotheses for future studies. Therefore, there are reduced possibilities of proposing direct causal intersections between the typologies presented. Our hermeneutic approach is closer to Rickert (1943) than Weber (1999).

while others wish for these families' presence but with limits. They are simultaneously desirable and undesirable.

This lack of consensus shows the plurality of perceptions and actions in the educational bureaucracy. Furthermore, some actions alluded to in common sense and the academic discourse as positive regarding the family-school relationship are sometimes considered controversial by managers.

Table 2.

Typology of perceptions, expectations, and stigmas on families and students

Category	Description	Perception about the families
High socioeconomic level and high expectations	Families that, according to managers, have better financial conditions than average, travel, and have more goods. They have a higher educational level, with higher education. Families with high expectations for their children's school trajectory, with no grade retention or drop-outs, in which higher education is seen as the end of their studies.	Desirable
Low socioeconomic level and/or low expectations	According to managers, these families are socially vulnerable, with no access to basic rights like sewage, housing, and transport. They are illiterate, semi-illiterate, with complete or incomplete middle school. "Broken families", with young parents and/or many children and/or lack of fathers and/or living with mother, step-father, and/or grandparents. Families with low expectations of their children's school trajectories, middle and/or high school seen as the end of studies.	Undesirable
Active families in the schooling processes and/or school spaces	According to managers, these families choose their children's schools, shifts, and/or classes based on school prestige, management, teaching staff, students' profiles, infrastructure, performance indexes, location, access, and security. Families concerned with students' learning and permanence, following school activities, are present in the school environment and close to managers and teachers. In this category are those known by the managers, among them former students, members of the community council, workers of the municipal education system, and families who reach out to other instances (such as politicians, religious organizations, NGOs, CRE, Prosecutor's Office, *Conselho Tutelar*[22]) to guarantee school access.	Desirable / Undesirable
Inactive families in the schooling processes and/or school spaces	Families that, according to managers, choose their children's schools depending on the proximity to their houses. Unconcerned families or with little access to information, who do not keep a dialogue with the school, and who do not seek guidance or information to improve children's school life. Families who are not found by telephone, letters, or personally.	Undesirable

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[22] Translation note (T.N.): The *Conselho Tutelar* in Brazil has a similar role to Child Protective Services in the United States. It is a permanent municipal body aiming to guarantee the rights of children and teenagers.

The first data we highlight in the Table regard the preference for families with a high socioeconomic level. Managers understand that families with better financial conditions, who travel more, have higher educational levels, have more educable children than those with illiterate parents, and are in socially vulnerable situations.

On the one hand, we see here something pointed out by the sociology of education since Coleman (1966), children's performance and school expectations are associated with their families' socioeconomic profile. On the other hand, as we have argued, managers' view on families' socioeconomic level can produce "self-fulfilling" prophecies regarding the students (Merton, 1968). Next, we demonstrate how the different categories appear in the managers' discourse.

4.1 – Families with a high socioeconomic level and high expectations

Manager Simaria[23], when describing the students' profiles in the school, indicates the division between two family types. There are those with a higher socioeconomic and cultural level and those with a lower socioeconomic level with illiterate parents and families who depend exclusively on the school to teach and feed their children. Many of these students have never left their territory.

> *So, we have a divided school. We have a group of students…with a family background, a cultural one, who travels. Great…Whose parents are more cultured, work, you know? Many parents with higher education. …And I also have students from a completely underprivileged class…whose only meal is here…Who only know this favela here, just this world here around them...Some parents can't sign.*

In the context of this interview and others, we have perceived that, in the managers' conceptions, the families' socioeconomic and cultural situation guide children's educational position, to a certain degree. Families with lower socioeconomic levels have a harder time educating their children due to their vulnerability. The contrary occurs with students from families with higher socioeconomic and cultural levels. While the students "*with a family background, cultural one, who travel*" are seen as having a "*great*" base. The others with "*parents who can't sign*" and only know "*this favela*" are not valued. There are subtleties in the manager's discourse that reveal a divided school and direct connections among the readings concerning

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[23] All names are fictional.

the students – visual identities in the sense of Goffman (1975) – and the school's social composition. A cycle of broadening and deepening the inequalities is thus created, connecting objective data about children's material conditions and the expectations of their learning abilities.

The principal Rafaela also establishes a direct correlation between the families' socioeconomic profile and the "family concern with formation", strongly marked by the difference between parents with higher income and the "parents from the community".

> it isn't a school inside a community [favela], this is also a distinction...we have a different profile, so these parents that are more concerned with the issue of formation...I'm not saying that in these communities there aren't parents with this profile, but we notice that the children come...all tidy with the material the mother purchases.

The managers also establish an automatic relation between families' socioeconomic level and high level of school expectations, as shown in the discourse of manager Valentine, indicating that, in her school, there are students, some who are nephews and nieces of teachers in the municipal system, who have a plan for the future and the potential to "*go beyond*".

> They say like "no, my mother was checking it. I was checking it. I want to enter the Colégio Militar [Military School] I want..." They have this perspective of future…They are planning…which university they want to follow. These are children that see in education a perspective of improvement…I see them as students, like, with a bright future. Future doctors, some returning here to teach. Because they think way ahead. There are some here… There is a group of 3 children that are nephews and nieces of teachers from the system. So, like, " oh my aunt tells me to study because I want to be a doctor". They even demand too much of themselves, sometimes, because of that. The perspective is to always go beyond, you know?

Next, we show how the managers consider the poorer families, the opposite pole of those with higher socioeconomic levels, as undesirable.

4.2 - Families with a low socioeconomic level and/or low expectations

In general, students from the poorest families are undesirable. Poverty conditions are directly related to shorter and more fragmented trajectories by the managers.

Regina is emphatic when connecting the families' living conditions and the impossibility of children's learning. She clarifies that she is demanding toward students, though knowing they

will not reach her requests. Her discourse makes her expectation of working with a model student clear. She wants to work with those ready to learn and fulfill her demands. Others are equally demanded but hang over them the prophecy that they will not learn (Merton, 1968; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

> *It's hard. We have cases here where the person has no bathroom. You know? Some people live in the middle of…within…wood cubicles, on land floors. You know? So, sometimes, we demand things from these children but if we face reality, they won't be able to reach what we're asking.*

Larissa also relates students' educational trajectory with their family situation. To her, students with less educated parents, semi-illiterate, or with "broken" families have fewer chances to end K-12 education.

> *To be realistic, unfortunately, less than half will finish high school. Their reality is of semi-illiterate or illiterate parents. I have parents here that can't sign their names...some do it with fingerprints and, when they are called, we have to get them a stamp pad to collect their digitals. You know? The level of violence and the family structure is also…broken. Most don't have a reality of father, mother, children, and siblings.*

The undesirable carry social or individual stigmas that go beyond the school's walls. Poor families, who cannot feed their children, are stigmatized because they hinder the development of what would be, according to the managers, the school's essential role. They could not educate the students in a strict sense because they would need to feed them and live with families that do not participate in the school routine as the managers would like.

Managers also associate families with a lower socioeconomic level with lower school expectations. Helena reinforces the idea that among the 35 students of a class, only 5 have the conditions to finish their studies. The cause for possible drop-outs and study discontinuities is the families' (dis) organization and low level of education.

> *The students who come to us, who already have a history of grade retention, who participated in some projects, who aren't followed by a guardian, that the parents don't raise, that are raised by the grandmothers, the aunts. Not that, like…that this is a label because, sometimes, they can be raised by a grandma or an aunt and be well-raised…I don't perceive this wish, this care, to form the children as if they were their own. I don't notice that.*

The manager Dorothy states that the families of "R" [regular] students are different from the "VG" [very good] and the "G" [good] students. The first one are the "ugly ducks" that

someone must take. The idea of obligation is explicit in her discourse, pointing out that there is no wish to receive those students but that she does for the lack of an alternative.

> *We notice that when we work with "R" students' families, the families are much farther from the school, this school value, you know? It's different! The families of "VG" students are one type of family, the family of the "G" student is the same family but the family of the "R" students is another one"…But the thing is, someone must take the ugly ducks.*

The excerpts highlight that the families are desirable or undesirable depending on their school expectations, family configuration, and place in society. In the interviews with the managers, there are no school expectations related to the pedagogical work held with the students by the teachers, the school, or the educational system. The literature on school effectiveness points out that increasing the expectations of students, together with a plan guided towards learning, tends to reduce the maintenance and production of educational inequalities among students (Brooke & Soares, 2008; Sammons, 2008).

Later, we will understand the perspective on active families in schooling and/or school spaces.

4.3 – Active families in the schooling processes and/or school spaces

This category includes more engaged families in their children's schooling, from the school choice to their presence in the school environment. This is among the non-consensus categories in the valuing processes presented by the managers. The families are simultaneously considered desirable and undesirable. To understand this process, we can compare them with the families considered inactive in the schooling processes and/or school spaces. In logical terms, these categories would be diametrically opposed but are not. Managers negatively perceive active families. We present the reflections about active families and, later, the opinions on inactive families to compare them.

Cecília gives an initial report in which she values families' actions related to school choice. However, later, she indicates other points that devalue actions of the same type.

I: And what happens when the ten students want to go to the same school and there are not enough places?

C: When this happened we agreed that all students who finished the Year 6 in the Escola Municipal Cristal would be relocated to another school in the same district. In the first year, the parents were satisfied, in the second year as well, in the third year, which was last year, some parents said "Well, I didn't want this one, I'd like my child to go to…", so I took this to the CRE, for the secretary…" I think you should give an option, as you do for the kindergarten", so they can opt for these school even if not in the same district. They accepted and that's how it happened.

The manager values families' actions concerning the search for desirable schools for their children. She establishes herself as a mediator between the families and the middle management, conducted in the CRE scope, which, according to her, might lead to changes in the enrollment rules. At the same time, Cecília shows her dissatisfaction with the families that want to decide the shift their students will teach.

"Cecília, my son is in the morning shift but I work. I wanted the afternoon one". Then I take my notebook: "Ok, I'll write down your name, telephone, child's name, telephone…Look, mommy, I can do it but only if the child's birth date is ok...because if it's not it can be harmful". It really does. It is not good for the child. Children with the same age, same interests, when children have different ages, they tend to have different interests. Before…now they are more...since last year, they understand it better but they used to scold me a lot".

We can see that the direct participation of the family in the construction of their children's school destinies has different values when involving actions targeting the intermediary management – CRE- and the school manager- the principal's office. There is a confrontation between two organizational logics. On the one hand, the pedagogical management understands that children should be grouped following age criteria because it believes that the same age range would create similar interests among the children. On the other hand, the guardians intend to choose children's shifts according to the family routine. In this conflicting scenario, though families are participative, the manager does not value this type of participation, as it disagrees with the pedagogical perspective of student grouping. Ultimately, the manager affirms that she is now more accepted and less scolded. The interview makes it clear that the manager accepts family demands but does not value them, as she understands that the pedagogical values associated with grouping should prevail. The conflicting situation is placated when the families start to understand them and reduce their complaints.

The interview with Cecília sums up the perceptions that establish a "tutored participation". The families are well-liked when they participate in school routines and dialogue with the managers, as long as they see this participation as ideal. This converges with the views Burgos (2009) mapped in parent meetings promoted by a school in a *favela* of Rio de Janeiro. He observed that, while the managers demanded family participation, they wanted them to participate within defined limits. This "tutored participation" shows one of the constitutive aspects of the managers' perspectives on families and the interactions they establish with the schools.

Valentine is another manager that values "tutored participation". She highlights family participation, considering it positive and one of the distinctions in her school. However, Valentine reveals conflicts between the perspectives of the management and one of the families on the best schools for the children. She affirms she does not send a child to a school "only because she [mother] wants". With this statement, she shows her understanding that, in the end, the management should define the school a child should be enrolled in middle school.

This manager's position conflicts with the rule established by the SME, which emphasizes that families should freely choose their children's schools. Valentine's justification for this action is grounded on what she believes to be the best for the children and the support the family could supposedly offer. Such decisions are taken based on the social virtual identities that the manager creates about the students and their families (Goffman, 1981) and establish themselves into discretionary actions, as they do not correspond to the rules established by the SME (Lipsky, 1980).

> *Our focus is on the child. I won't say "Ah, as this mother wants a lot I'll send her son there just because she wants". Maybe it won't be good for the sun because we know the school's demand for middle school and, sometimes, it won't be good for this child to go to that school [...]. Then the father says, "yeah, but.." We go on with this conversation..."you wait a little after the meeting so we can talk". Then we bring them here to this room and say "mommy, you know that the demand in this school is higher. Do you think you will be able to help you son?" Then, she says "Ah, yeah, right? She is so slow. She is so bad at that. It would be better for her not to go there"….The parents even agree.*

Similarly, the active families that mobilize third parties to seek access to places in the desired schools, such as the CRE, the *Conselho tutelar* and the Prosecutor's Office are sometimes seen as desirable and others as undesirable. Families who contact the CRE to get places are

perceived positively when seeking schools that do a good job. Betina's discourse shows the relation between indication and recognition of the good job done by the school. At her school, for example, there are students with families in the municipal system and in CRE:

> *I: Has CRE ever sent or indicated students to your school directly?*
>
> *B: Yes, children or grandchildren of CRE students who came here.*
>
> *I: So they send them like : "Ah, it is my cousin, my nephew, go to that school"*
>
> *B: They indicate it. The IDEB[24] here is 6.4. "The IDEB there is good, the school is good". They know it, they know me. They know my day by day, they know how things work.*

On the other hand, Dorothy mentions families that have contacted CRE to get a place, in the case of students who left the school *"due to the regiment"*. These families are perceived as negative. Dorothy calls attention to the possibility of denying a place, even if it comes from CRE, because there is some margin for negotiation.

> *D: So, depending on the student, they say...If it is a former student who maybe has suffered because of the regiment, I say "don't send him!". Because sometimes the student leaves here with the regiment…Then this happens [...]*
>
> *I: And is there a problem if you say you don't want a certain student?*
>
> *D: If I'm backed up by the regiment then there are zero problems.*

These testimonies, as others reported by the managers, indicate two aspects of CRE: it has among its attributions the indication of schools with places for the families who seek them and there is a discretionary space to indicate certain schools to known families and even their own relatives. Similarly, the managers also have a discretionary action: they accept certain families and deny access to others, based on their interests (Almeida, 2019; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003;).

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[24] T.N.: *Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica* (Ideb- Development Index of K-12 Education) is calculated using data from the School Census and the performance in the National Evaluation system. The index varies from 0 to 10.

The families that appeal to the *Conselho Tutelar* and the Prosecutor's Office are always perceived negatively due to the interference of other instances in the school environment. In the case of the Prosecutor's Office due to its enforcement power ("*make it so*"), and in the *Conselho Tutelar* or neighborhood association by its attempt to interfere at school, as can be seen in the interview with the manager Valentine:

> *The Prosecutor's Office ordered, we have to enroll. I have no places left, but it is a 'make it so'.*

> *I remember she [a person from the neighborhood association] told me, hitting the counter," ah, so there isn't, is it? I know the ways to follow. We'll see if these children are not coming here". They didn't because there really was no place. She sends the mother to the Conselho, and the Conselho sends a paper asking for a place here, so I attend if there is a place."*

The political aspect is recurrent in the managers' discourse about using third parties for families to get school places. Despite the comment on the lower number of families using politicians to guarantee places, the managers indicate that this still occurs, directly or indirectly. According to the manager Paula:

> *I: how about without the CRE? Directly here with you, politicians...*

> *P: The first thing I say is 'no'. I get annoyed. Because everybody has the same right, you know? And I get really mad that I have to say I don't have a place and being forced to enroll a child because it is a demand.*

> *P: I have to enroll, I can't question.*

> *I: And if there isn't a place?*

> *P: Even if I don't.*

> *I: How come?*

> *P: Surplus. The child doesn't have a place, he is in the surplus. You know? I have more students than I should in the class because there is a demand from above me…The surpluses, in this moment, we have to try to accommodate them, to help everyone.*

In the managers' testimonies about the families who seek the school using third parties, there are mentions about the limit of places as a part of the process to get a place or not. This indicates that the managers are dialoguing with the enrollment resolutions and the rules concerning the number of students per classroom. However, their interviews also show space for the managers' and CRE's discretionary actions when getting (or not) a place. The desirable families are those that seek, through others, a good school. The undesirable ones seek privileges and are socially stigmatized due to their social situation.

This category includes families present in the school environment, which are simultaneously seen as desirable and undesirable. There are more positive than negative mentions but, as we perceived in the managers' discourse, they positively value the families that are present and follow the schools' "tutoring", and negatively when the families are present but question the schools' work.

The manager Rebeca is one of those who analyze family presence in school through positive lens. To her, family is welcome in parent meetings and there are "packed" meetings. In other moments, the meetings need to be booked. That is, they can always be at school and when the management calls them. Again, we can see the positive idea of the families in school, as long as it is tutored and guided by the management.

However, families' presence can be seen as negative when they question or supervise school work. Rebeca emphasizes this perception when narrating a mother's criticism about a movie shown at school at the end of the school year.

> *At home, it's the mother's [responsibility], if we show something that is not good; 'the school did that?!". And the child is there watching who knows what at 11 at night, awaken at two o'clock, and you're there sleeping. But here at school, we have to have this control because if not, the guys will be tripping. I'm the one who'll have to listen. This has happened once! One of our teachers showed a movie, this teacher was a pain, a real pain, very strict, but the movie had some scenes…If I hadn't seen it at the time I would…But the children asked, and we were at the end of the year, you know? There was no content to give, any! Nothing! The teacher was like, in the last week...Then, two days later, a mother demanded my position on what has happened…I said: "if the teacher has talked with me and I agreed, no, we wouldn't check his absence, and he would have another activity, reading in the reading room". What I needed was the teachers' final reports with the grades. If your son stayed behind to torture himself, then it's another story but I do follow the pedagogical [work] but I'd advise you not to let him see this movie, ok?"*

The educational debates often reinforce the importance of families in school. Without denying the contemporary process that redefines the roles of school and family in the educational market, the sociological literature has studies portraying how this relationship occurs amidst tensions and conflicts (Nogueira, 2005). We discuss these results by showing that the managers criticize families' presence and pedagogical actions.

Managers consider positive the families that seek the school guidance on governmental aid or to help with family conflicts. Manager Betina points out that this guidance is part of the school's role and can favor the student.

The families that exchange information about what the students do at school (for example, using swearwords and conversations about sex), are perceived negatively. In this group, there are also families that complain about the school work. The manager Jean presents these situations:

> *And the children, they talk about...sex, you know? This and that...the manager Leira is already desperate with this "guys, I have to separate these kids. This won't work out". The mother is going to complain on Monday..."Ah, the students said this, that, and that in the classroom". As if we had any control on the students' mouths. I can't control the students' mouthsThe student will say what he is used to say. He will do what he's used to do. [...] The school won't change this in the student.*

The information exchange is well-liked and welcomed when acts positively in the student's school life and the in the indication of school trajectories. This posture is also positively evaluated if there is a manager's "tutoring" in this process. However, when these exchanges question the school work and its organization or influence the manager's enrollment decisions, then the families are undesirable. Managers indicate that the families have – or should have- specific roles in the school spaces but what they see as pedagogical should be exclusively reserved for school staff. Such tensions have already been pointed out in discussions in the sociological field of family-school relationships, mainly Silva (2010). In other studies (Rosistolato & Viana, 2014; Rosistolato et al. 2016, 2019) we analyzed families' perspectives on the enrollment processes and identified different perspectives – among families and managers – on the phenomenon of school enrollment, as well as conflicts, articulations, and processes of social navigation inherent to the interactions developed at this moment.

As a whole, our studies support the argument that, amidst the bureaucratic enrollment procedures, there are significant disputes about the sense of schooling for students. Such

disputes involve the families and the school bureaucracy and contribute to the definition of students' school trajectories. Such disputes happen in the micro-relations developed among the agents and are crossed by different processes of labeling and stigmatization.

4.4 - Inactive families in the schooling processes and/or school spaces

The families assembled in this category are undesirable by all interviewed managers. There were no positive value given to inactive families. According to the managers, these families are absent, do not dialogue, do not seek information about children's schools, and do not update their data, such as address or telephone.

The management understands that some families have low educational levels and little knowledge about the educational system. Nonetheless, this does not stop it from questioning that the students' guardians do not update their data, do not know their children's school year, or that the school ends in one educational phase and they need to change schools. The lack of knowledge and commitment to education is negatively evaluated.

The manager Betina reports her difficulty with families that do not follow the dates and the organization determined by the school for the process of school choice in the relocation from elementary to middle school. In the case of her school, she holds a meeting to define which schools parents want. Those who participate have a priority choice. According to the management, the families that arrive late to ask for places are considered to have an undesirable behavior. Betina organizes the enrollment procedure with the families and attends to the demands of those that participated in the meeting. She clarifies that there are no possibilities nor arguments to accept the choices of absent families. Participation or not in the meeting is a manager's criterion concerning the families. At the same time, the interview does not reveal the processes for publicizing the meetings nor the reasons that would justify the absence of the families.

> *I hold a meeting with the parents. I tell them;" I can send to X, Y, and Z. These three schools. Who wants to go to X, who wants to go to Y, and who wants Z. I only have these many places". Until now, thank God, I had no problems getting into the meeting and not being able to answer their demands. But for those who don't come to the meeting, to this point, it was like this, those who didn't come to the meeting and say "Ah, I want this" "Look, if you had come to the meeting I could do it, I had the place but now I don't have a place for this school. Only to this one and to that one."*

There is a consensus among the managers that the families who did not enroll or did not follow the demands of the education system and school rules are undesirable. Some families are undesirable because they are called to the school to attend to a child's problem but do not solve it. Regina makes this explicit when talking about the situations in which there is a lack of family care with young children and the advice she gives them.

> So, there are families that...like...they give a certain autonomy. They come here, they authorize them to leave alone. And by "going home alone", we know that they will do everything alone. It will not be only going alone, you know? You start noticing, like, that a child is getting here more careless, that the other one doesn't do the homework anymore, the other has forgotten school material, has lost it. So, we notice that they are losing support…from the family. So, some that can deal with that very well. But we can notice a drop in others, you know? Then, we call the family, you talk, and your focus is on that…" look, your child is coming alone because you have gone to work. You can't pick up and drop them. But, you have to look after your child sometimes, you know? To see what they are doing in school, follow their school life". I had a colleague that said that we had to have a school for parents. Yeah, you know. They become parents very early. So, two years in a row here, we had 12-year-old students getting pregnant. Studying here, you know…and they got pregnant. I mean, this is a child raising another child.

The manager Paula reports the case of unknown families, also undesirable by school managers:

> As there are those I've never seen...that the child with six, seven years old come from the favela alone [...]cross the stress alone and I don't even know the parents' face.

In the managers' discourse, the undesirable families are, once again, those that, besides not dialoguing with the school and not attending the demands of the school and the system, carry social stigmas, such as poor families, young parents, vulnerable, and low educational level.

5 – Specific contributions and remarks

During this article, we have shown that school managers work with virtual social identities that include, prior to any knowledge of the students, representations on the profile of desirable and undesirable students – who "nobody wants", unable to learn. The desirable students have the conditions considered ideal for learning, including a type of family action expected by the school in this process. The undesirables have the opposite profile, carrying

social stigmas and living in poverty. They are the children of young and vulnerable parents with low educational levels and expectations.

Since the introduction, we have shown sociological and anthropological studies that point out the correlation between representations and teachers' expectations towards students and their academic results. We dialogued with classic studies that argued on this correlation and problems raised by it to the most vulnerable students. There is some consensus on school's tendency – as an institution – to reproduce origin social inequalities, paying more attention to those needing less, while stigmatizing, labeling, and excluding the students needing the most attention. In this sense, our study corroborates the works and theories developed by them.

We bring a specific contribution. The differences in the social and cultural background in the municipal system of Rio de Janeiro – though significant – do not explain all the performance differences among students. We have investigated families and students that could be classified as equivalent in terms of background but still have children with divergent educational trajectories. In macro-sociological terms, the theories on the correlation between social and cultural background and school performance are still confirmed. In micro-sociological terms, they explain little, mainly when we think about the exceptions (Lahire, 1998). These are the cases of students with profiles to develop "successful" or "failing" trajectories but end up having the exact opposite.

We decided to focus on micro-sociological aspects and sought to promote a dialogue between macro-sociological theories that compose the sociology of education and a particular micro-approach, brought by interactionist studies, mainly the works of Erving Goffmam. This author's main contribution is the arguments on the social processes that are developed – in a way regardless of the macro variables – at the interaction level. The interaction contexts and scenarios promote specific relationships between the agents that, in its turn, can alter trajectories that would be "predictable" in macro-sociological terms.

This article shows that managers operated based on classifications that even precede the first meeting with the students. These are the "virtual identities" discussed by Goffman. After meeting them, there is what we can classify as "referendum interactions"- which confirm the expectations about students, and those that can be seen as "counterintuitive interactions" that shatter the school staff's opinions about the students.

The main point is that "referendum interactions" and "counterintuitive" ones could – or should - be relativized in the scope of pedagogical practices but tend to be considered as "truths" and continue to guide students' trajectories. Besides the reproduction of inequalities, the stigmatization process of certain family profiles, shown in the article, producing inequalities in the school. Managers establish relations between certain family profiles and supposed difficulties or (im)possibilities of learning. They also guide their actions based on a previous classification that allocates the families and their children into desirable and undesirable profiles. Therefore, there are suppositions about the future school trajectories of students from certain profiles that can materialize themselves as self-fulfilling prophecies, contributing to consolidating the fragmented school destinies, exactly among those that need the school and its pedagogical offering the most.

The scenario described places significant challenges to teacher and management training. The insertion on the debate about the effects – sometimes perverse – of the pedagogical interactions is capital for school professionals to relative the school perspectives about students' "virtual identities", which necessarily requires the relativization of our world perspectives. This exercise – inherent to anthropological and sociological investigations – can directly contribute to producing and reproducing educational inequalities in school.

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