

Beyond management: the process of managing at a Public School of Elementary Education in Brazil

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Abstract

This article aims to understand the so-called managing process in a public elementary school as a relational and emergent process, beyond the idea of management. Managing as a process in Brazilian public schools is a phenomenon with peculiar characteristics, since it involves multiple actors of a school community. Everyday practices, conflicts, uncertainties, negotiations, and diverse interests constantly arise in everyday school life. Hence, it is fundamental to study school management not from a perspective of something static and given a priori, but as a constant dynamic managing process, in which management itself is (re)constructed by continuous interactions between people and situations they experience in organizational everyday life. Data was collected using the shadowing technique, which consists of the daily monitoring of an organizational actor during a certain period, in their daily tasks, and documents of the school studied. Systematic observations occurred from February to May 2015, complemented by more sporadic visits to the field from June to September 2015. Data were analyzed through content analysis. The obtained results point to school managing as a constant process of evolution that is situated, transitory, and product of the dialogues, interactions, and experience of emergencies and critical moments in daily school life.

Keywords: School managing. Public school. Managing. Shadowing.

Para além do management: o processo de managing em uma Escola Pública de Ensino Fundamental no Brasil

Resumo

Este artigo objetiva compreender a gestão em uma escola pública de ensino fundamental como um processo relacional e emergente, para além do management. A gestão das escolas públicas brasileiras é um fenômeno com características peculiares, dado que envolve múltiplos atores da comunidade escolar. Assim, práticas cotidianas, conflitos, incertezas, negociações e interesses diversos surgem constantemente no dia a dia escolar. Diante disso, é fundamental estudar a gestão escolar sob uma ótica que considere a gestão não como algo estático e dado a priori, como na ideia do management, mas enquanto um constante processo dinâmico de managing, no qual a gestão é (re)construída a partir das contínuas interações entre as pessoas e as situações vivenciadas por elas no cotidiano organizacional. Nesse sentido, para a coleta de dados, este estudo utilizou a técnica shadowing, que consiste no acompanhamento cotidiano de um ator organizacional durante determinado período de tempo, nas suas ocupações diárias, e documentos da escola estudada. As observações sistemáticas ocorreram de fevereiro a maio de 2015, complementadas por visitas mais esporádicas ao campo de junho a setembro do mesmo ano. Os dados foram analisados via análise de conteúdo. Os resultados obtidos apontam para uma gestão escolar como um constante processo de vir a ser, situado, transitório e produto dos constantes diálogos, interações e vivência de emergências e momentos críticos no cotidiano escolar.

Palavras-chave: Gestão escolar. Escola pública. Managing. Shadowing.

Más allá del management: el proceso de managing en una Escuela Pública de Enseñanza Fundamental en Brasil

Resumen

Este artículo se propone comprender cómo la gestión en una escuela pública de enseñanza fundamental se caracteriza como un proceso relacional y emergente, más allá del *management*. La gestión de las escuelas públicas brasileñas es un fenómeno con características peculiares, dado que involucra a múltiples actores de la comunidad escolar. Por eso, prácticas cotidianas, conflictos, incertidumbres, negociaciones e intereses diversos surgen constantemente en la vida cotidiana escolar. Por lo tanto, es fundamental estudiar la gestión escolar bajo una óptica que la considere no como algo estático y dado *a priori*, como en la idea del *management*, sino como un constante proceso dinámico de gestión, en el cual la gestión, como *managing*, es (re) construida a partir de las continuas interacciones entre las personas y las situaciones vivenciadas por ellas en la rutina organizacional. En este sentido, para la recolección de datos, este estudio utilizó la técnica *shadowing*, que consiste en el seguimiento cotidiano de un actor organizacional durante determinado período de tiempo, en sus ocupaciones diarias, y documentos de la escuela estudiada. Las observaciones sistemáticas ocurrieron de febrero a mayo de 2015, complementadas por visitas más esporádicas al campo de junio a septiembre del mismo año. Los datos se analizaron a través del análisis de contenido. Los resultados obtenidos apuntan hacia una gestión escolar como un constante proceso de venir a ser, situado, transitorio y producto de los constantes diálogos, interacciones y vivencia de emergencias y momentos críticos en la vida cotidiana escolar.

Palabras clave: Gestión escolar. Escuela pública. Managing. Shadowing.

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INTRODUCTION

Based on the Federal Constitution of 1988 and Law No. 9,394 of December 20, 1996 – the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education (LGB) -, it has been defined that public education will be guided by democratic principles, involving multiple actors of the school community: the principal, teachers and other employees, parents, students and local community leaders. Various participation mechanisms have been proposed to implement democratic management within this context, including school boards and direct elections for principals (LÜCK, 2011). This marks an important achievement in the quest to minimize the inequalities that exist in Brazilian educational policy (LÜCK, 2006) to the extent that school management has been shown to be a rich means of creating learning opportunities for students (SPILLANE, 2015). At the same time, the democratic management of public schools has spurred distinct practices, resistance, conflicts, uncertainties and various interests (DRABACH and MOUSQUER, 2009; LÜCK, 2011; VARGAS and JUNQUILHO, 2013) which influence the way in which school management is practiced by various actors and its nature as a social phenomenon.

Within this context, the work of the principal has been significantly affected, because generally he or she needs to (re)construct relationships with the school community and the central educational governing body in the course of performing practical activities, keeping in mind that the principal generally is elected and faces the dilemma of meeting the often conflicting interests and needs of these two segments (PARO, 2010).

However, it may be perceived that the literature on school management is still focused on the prescriptive and rational nature of administration. According to Lück (2011) and Souza (2012), between the 1930s and 1980s, the debate concerning **school administration**, was based on scientific administration and considered technical elements as a whole as the resources used by the principal to achieve the school's objectives through technical improvements.

Beginning at the end of the 1980s, works such as Félix (1984), Teixeira (1988) and Paro (1988) were fundamental to the construction of a more critical body of knowledge in terms of what was termed school administration. Through this new conception, there was a transition to the idea of **school management**, capable of identifying the dynamics of the social processes within the educational process (LÜCK, 2011). This trend, noticeably more critical, came to recognize the political nature of managing public schools, as well as the relevance of its democratization, seeking to stimulate a dialogue with, and the participation of, the school community (SOUZA, 2006, 2012; DRABACH and SOUZA, 2014).

Even so, even though the new ideas which have added to the school management field have been fundamental, especially because they have come closer to a school's everyday point of view (FERRAÇO, 2007; SPILLANE, 2015) and are focused on the importance of considering the co-existence of pedagogical and administrative aspects as inherent to the management process (PARO, 2010), the discussion of this phenomenon in public schools is still based on what Cunliffe (2014) conceives of as *management*, with the understanding that management is seen as something ordered, rational and static. Paro (2010), for example, understands management or administration as a means to achieve certain ends, based on the rational use of resources, independent of the nature of what is being administered.

This article, on the other hand, seeks to reopen the subject of school management to go beyond management, based on the idea of *managing* (CUNLIFFE, 2014) as a dynamic, collective and unfinished process, a work in progress. This approach has been fundamental in the attempt to establish a research agenda that considers the nature of the management process not just as something determined and static, but rather something fluid, fragmented, collective, emergent and unfinished which is the fruit of social dialogue and relationships (WATSON, 2005; CUNLIFFE, 2014). Through this approach and emphasizing the practice of leadership and management in relation to aspects of school teaching and learning (DIAMOND and SPILLANE, 2016), it is possible to obtain a better understanding of school management as a process under constant (re)construction (WATSON, 2001).

Based on these considerations, this article seeks to deal with the following problem: **How can public school management be characterized as a relational and emergent process?** Three aspects justify this study. First, as Paro (2010) points out, the literature on school management lacks studies that seek a deeper understanding of the contradictory nature of the work of a school principal. By seeking to bring the main ideas addressed in the field of school management in Brazil closer to the notion of management as a dynamic and emergent process, (WATSON, 2001, 2005; CUNLIFFE, 2014), we seek to fill this gap.

Secondly, in looking beyond the isolated actions of a principal (VARGAS and JUNQUILHO, 2013; DIAMOND and SPILLANE, 2016), we seek to recognize the relevance of democratic management in public schools as a way to assure the quality of education (LÜCK, 2009; PARO, 2010). This focus is important, because studies have shown that interaction with the school community has a practical impact on the quality and opportunities for student education (SPILLANE, 2015).

Third, this study contributes to a research agenda regarding Organizational Studies that seeks to move forward from the idea of *management* to *managing*. This means coming to understand management as a process that is constructed via dialogue and social relationships and is always unfinished and emergent (WATSON, 2005; CUNLIFFE, 2001, 2014, 2016).

THEORETICAL REFERENCES

School management and its plural nature

The principle that guides the actions of school management is democratic management. A result of the re-democratization process in Brazil, it is a fundamental point in the discussion of this phenomenon, because it regulates the ways in which society can participate, control and monitor education in public schools (DRABACH and SOUZA, 2014). Various participation mechanisms have been created, through the LGB, such as the direct election of school principals, municipal boards, school boards and student associations (LÜCK, 2006), promoting greater chances to improve the student educational environment, as well as the school community's participation in management (VELOSO, CRAVEIRO and RUFINO, 2012, p. 819).

At the same time, public schools and their management have been permeated by a series of dilemmas, power disputes, diverse opinions and collectively constructed practices (LÜCK, 2006, 2011; DRABACH and MOUSQUER, 2009; PARO, 2010; SOUZA, 2012). Moreover, school management has come to be considered not uniquely the responsibility of the principal (VARGAS and JUNQUILHO, 2013). In making this a phenomenon which includes the participation of the entire school community, the vision of the school principal has gone from being the one who possesses the specific abilities, behavior and attributes to perform this job (HALLINGER, 2011) to the idea of management being something that is distributed (SPILLANE, 2005; DIAMOND and SPILLANE, 2016). From this new perspective, school management is seen as a product of the interactions between the principal, the school community and the distinct situations and contexts that surround them (DIAMOND and SPILLANE, 2016).

This is why more and more studies of school management in Brazil have attached importance to the everyday existence of these schools (FERRAÇO, 2007; PARO, 2010; SOUZA and GOUVEIA, 2010; DRABACH and SOUZA, 2014; SPILLANE, 2015), because it is from this point of view that one can “[...] feel this world, and seek to understand its logic [...]; to go beyond what others have seen” (FIORIO, LYRIO and FERRAÇO, 2012, p. 570). This effort, therefore is significant because it makes it possible to reveal the complexities of public schools in greater depth, without worrying about assuring beforehand in a singular manner, the diversity and plurality of everyday school life (FERRAÇO and ALVES, 2015).

However, the discussion of management in public schools is still rooted in the idea conceived of by Cunliffe (2014) as *management*. The author believes that anchored to this new concept is the notion of a static, rational, and ordered *a priori* process. This can be perceived, for example, in Paro (2010, p. 765), who identifies administration in an uncritical manner as “[...] the rational utilization of resources to achieve ends, independent of the nature of ‘the object’ [author’s emphasis] that is being administered.” Lück (2011), Souza (2012), Drabach and Souza (2014), in a similar manner, even though they point out the collective nature of management and the importance of school participation for Brazilian public education, discuss this phenomenon from the point of view of the managerial functions of the school principal. In this sense, the focus is on the individual and the role that he or she has in coordinating and fulfilling administrative and pedagogical objectives within the realm of general knowledge, as well as articulating the mobilization that he or she promotes with other members of the school community.

This aspect should not be ignored in studies of public school management. However, there needs to be a focus on its everyday functioning in order to reveal the constant (re)invention of practices by the members (CERTEAU, 2008) of the school community within their respective contexts (FERRAÇO, 2007). Therefore, in considering the school principal as one of various practicers of school management, it is essential to try to understand how the practice of school management is realized in terms of

how social interactions occur with the community and the central educational body in various school situations and events (DIAMOND and SPILLANE, 2016).

The search for this new agenda can contribute to a better discussion and understanding of the paradoxical nature of public schools. At the same time that these professionals are subordinate to the municipal government and thus need to follow administrative laws, rules and forms of conduct required by the central educational body, they also have to meet the expectations and desires of the community that elected them. However, frequently the wishes of the local government and the community are conflicting, making management not only strategic, but paradoxical (PARO, 2010).

In other words, we need to not only consider the pre-established functions of principals but also the dynamics of *managing* public schools based on this new concept. From this perspective, we can study the complex context of the democratic management of public schools and consider its emergent, relational, distributed, social and unfinished characteristics (WATSON, 2005; DIAMOND and SPILLANE, 2016) as a policy phenomenon that is made and remade by school communities.

Management with a procedural-relational focus

The theme of managerial work is discussed from a variety of points of view in organizational studies. The preference for studying the management phenomenon without considering the subjective and emotional aspects of managers is still strong within organizational studies (TENGBLAD, 2012). This is because “good managers” are considered by some schools to be those who are rational and objective. Any emotional or subjective influence in their work is considered to be unprofessional (TENGBLAD, 2012).

This perception is close to the ideas of *management*, whose vision is that managers should exhibit rational behavior, always oriented towards clear objectives and roles that are well-defined *a priori* within specific structures. From this perspective, according to Cunliffe (2014), the manager is the one who resolves problems, controls and disciplines employees and runs things efficiently. Using an approach that is critical of this concept of *management*, this article views management as a social phenomenon based on the idea of *managing* (CUNLIFFE, 2014). This runs counter to conventional thinking of management as being linked to a group of purely rational techniques that should be applied in a simplified manner to solve organizational problems. Beyond the perspective of focusing on general rules of the “best” way to manage, the idea of *managing* makes it possible to conceive of management as a dynamic process that is socially (re)constructed every day by organizational actors in a collective manner (CUNLIFFE, 2014, 2016).

Assuming this approach is important, because authors such as Cunliffe (2014, 2016), Tengblad (2012) and Watson (2001) have found that managing has a strong emotional character in the everyday life of an organization, due to the relationships that the manager has with other people and daily pressures, anxieties and unexpected events. Given this, Cunliffe (2014, 2016) writes that the appearance of new ways of *thinking, organizing, and managing and relating* with people becomes fundamental.

Based on the ideas of *managing*, social realities are constructed and shaped to the extent that interpersonal relationships are established and we attempt to give meaning to what happens around us (CUNLIFFE, 2014). In this way it is possible to state that organizations do not possess pre-defined structures, but rather are constantly emerging based on the daily interactions and dialogue that occur between managers and other organizational actors, configuring the plane of intersubjectivity (CUNLIFFE, 2014, 2016)

In this aspect, *managing* presents itself as an alternative way of discussing procedural-relational management, refuting the notion of the organization as “an object” and adopting the view of the organization as consisting of “organizational relationships” (WATSON, 2005). The premise is not that managers should ignore the classic activities of planning, making decisions, or using management models, but that aspects such as relationships and intersubjectivity should also be taken into account (TENGBLAD and VIE, 2012; CUNLIFFE, 2014). In this way, in addition to facing technical problems during their daily work, they face difficulties in terms of relationships (SHOTTER and TSOUKAS, 2014). In this sense, managerial work practices are developed gradually over time and are characterized by surprises (TENGBLAD, 2012) and interrelationships (CUNLIFFE, 2014).

Putting it in a different way, the manager’s work is always putting out fires, an eternal process of *becoming* (WATSON, 2001, 2005). Based on this principle, he proposes that “[...] all organizational situations should be understood as situations that

occur at a particular time within the context of a specific society or community” (WATSON, 2005, p. 19). Within these various contexts, the difficulties that managers face revolve around how they spontaneously see, listen, perceive, feel and value particular situations and experiences that take place around them (SHOTTER and TSOUKAS, 2014). According to this logic and supported by Cunliffe’s ideas (2014), the management of public schools encompasses various practices, permeated by and (re)shaped by constant tensions, which are all part of a continuous and incomplete process – *managing*.

Seeking to understand managers from this point of view can help us understand some very important traits of management practices in public schools by considering them to be “emergent” social phenomena. They can also be viewed as processes which are the fruit of social interrelationships (CUNLIFFE, 2001; WATSON, 2001, 2005) within the school community. In this sense, we propose to focus on clues in terms of how *managing* occurs in public schools, anchored by the democratic process that permeates the management of Brazilian public schools, discussing it as a dynamic, fluid and unfinished phenomenon.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURE

Type of research and the selection of the study’s *locus*

This study is based on the idea that a researcher faces the daily dilemmas, interactions and dynamics of everyday school life (FERRAÇO, 2007; FIORIO, LYRIO and FERRAÇO, 2012; JUNQUILHO, ALMEIDA and SILVA, 2012) based on the perception that these realities are constructed socially. Therefore, it is based on the principles of qualitative research, in which the normal separation between the researcher and the object under investigation does not exist (DENZIN and LINCOLN, 2000).

This study has thus been developed in a public elementary school in the capital city of a state in southeastern Brazil. In 2015, when one of the authors of this article was in this field, the school had 557 students, 291 of whom studied in the morning and 266 during the afternoon. These two periods consisted of students from grades 1 through 9 with a total of 24 classes in the school. In total there were 35 teachers, 18 in the morning and 17 in the afternoon, three coordinators in the morning, three in the afternoon, and two curriculum planners in the morning and two in the afternoon.

This school was selected for two reasons. First, we sought a municipal public school whose principal had recently been elected by the school community and who had never held this position. This criterion was central to understanding the *managing* process based on a discussion with this person about the daily challenges of performing this work for the first time and how this work is based on daily social interactions with the school community (WATSON, 2005; CUNLIFFE, 2014).

The second criterion was a particular characteristic of the institution selected. Among those schools that had recently elected principals, the selected school was located in a temporary space ceded by the municipality, which was in a neighborhood that was different from where the school was originally located. The reason for this change was the need to renovate the building where classes were offered up until 2014. However, the school community had always been against this move due to it being a location 1.5 to 2 kilometers away (depending on where students lived) and also being in a neighborhood characterized by fighting by rival gangs from these two neighborhoods. Given this, there was great dissatisfaction on the part of the school community, which had a significant effect on the management process. This aspect therefore became a focal point of the investigation to shed light on the idea of an unfinished, relational and emergent process (WATSON, 2005; CUNLIFFE, 2014).

Data collection techniques and method analysis

Based on this study’s objective, we opted for the systematic experience which was realized by one of the authors in the school’s daily life between February and September 2015. Two techniques were used for data collection: 1) non-participant observation via *shadowing*, in which notes were taken in field diaries; and 2) school documents. The observations took place between two and five times a week, always alternating morning and afternoon periods, with a duration of between 2 to 5 hours per day, depending on the events of the day under observation or, when possible, conversations with the principal after classes had finished. All of the field observations were noted in the field diaries, in notebooks or by cell phone, in which keywords or phrases were used for later elaboration.

The *shadowing* technique consists of following an organizational actor during a given period of time in his or her daily functions, based on real events, and not on the reconstruction of events that have already occurred (MCDONALD, 2005; CZARNIAWSKA, 2007). This being so, this technique consists of following people, independent of where they are or what they are doing, which requires concentration and vigor on the part of the researcher (ARMAN, VIE and ASVOLL, 2012). Thus, *shadowing* makes it possible for the researcher to accompany the individual under observation physically within the organization (MCDONALD, 2005) as well as making comments and asking questions during this period of observation (GILL, BARBOUR and DEAN, 2014).

By virtue of these aspects, *shadowing* opens space for the creation of a unique relationship between the person being accompanied and the researcher, because they mutually observe each other. In other words, during the events that occur in the field, similarities and differences between the researcher and the one being observed are established, since the former asks questions but at the same time is observed by the latter, thus forming a dual perception (CZARNIAWSKA, 2007).

This very close relationship between the researcher and the person under observation, *shadowing* frequently leaves researchers in an unenviable position, since they feel that their privacy is being invaded and thereby seek to make information concerning organizational dynamics confidential (ARMAN, VIE and ASVOLL, 2012). In relation to this point, the researcher needs to constantly negotiate and renegotiate with the individuals who are the subjects of these field observations (CZARNIAWSKA, 2007; ARMAN, VIE and ASVOLL, 2012). On the other hand, this technique has the advantage of making the researcher more understanding in terms of the views and problems of the person being accompanied, which makes it possible to obtain detailed data that is fundamental to the study's success (ARMAN, VIE and ASVOLL, 2012).

It should be stated that *shadowing* makes it possible for the researcher to accompany other people in the organization under observation at various moments. This strategy is important to obtaining other perspectives in terms of the organization's everyday existence (ARMAN, VIE and ASVOLL, 2012). Thus, even though *shadowing* proposes that an individual organizational actor be followed, the unit of analysis is never the individual under examination or that person's isolated actions, but rather management practices (CZARNIAWSKA, 2007; GILLIAT-RAY, 2011).

Therefore in this study, the unit of analysis was not just the principal and her actions, but the social interrelationships with the school community which are responsible for the configuration of distinct characteristic practices of school management. The selection of this technique is justified by the fact that *shadowing* is a technique that makes it possible to obtain profound field experience. In this sense, to understand the *managing* process as the fruit of social relationships (WATSON, 2005; CUNLIFFE, 2014), it is important that the researcher observe how individuals experience everyday organizational life (CZARNIAWSKA, 2007).

In terms of the data from the documents, the school board meeting minutes were the main sources. They provided complementary information that helped us understand the distinct phenomena of everyday management.

The data collected was analyzed using content analysis, which is based on its message. In this way, content analysis makes it possible for the researcher to make inferences about what is being said and written and with what intensity the figurative symbols are used to express the ideas, silences and little stars of communication (FRANCO, 2005).

The analysis categories were defined *a posteriori* by considering them within a dynamic, plural and complex school context (DRABACH and MOUSQUER, 2009; LÜCK, 2011; VARGAS and JUNQUILHO, 2013). These characteristics make everyday experience unpredictable and rich in information. Therefore new and important data appeared daily in such a manner that a pre-definition of categories would have implied limiting the data. The categories are thematic, in which the researcher seeks significance, connotations and meanings behind the affirmations made by the data sources (FRANCO, 2005). Following this logic, the data was read and codes were defined as expressions arose and events occurred. All of the material was then reread, and all of the codes representing common themes were grouped together and later reduced to a list of seven subcategories (BOGDAN and BIKLEN, 1994). These seven subcategories then were grouped within three thematic categories. However, for reasons of scope, this article will only address one of determined categories, which includes three subcategories and is described in the following section.

RESULTS

School management is not an island: the influence of the school community on the management process

Everyday policy negotiations: the opposition and the base of allies

To develop this topic it is fundamental to initially point out how the school's election process occurred, because it was something that had a strong influence on the everyday relationships between the principal and the other school employees during the beginning of her mandate. The person who would have taken her place as a candidate was a male teacher from the afternoon period, who was going to run against a female teacher and a female coordinator from the morning period. A few days before the candidate registration, the teacher withdrew as a candidate for personal reasons.

This preoccupied a large portion of the teaching staff, because the candidate that was leading the race was a teacher from the morning period who did not have a good relationship with the other teachers. Given this, the teachers mobilized and proposed a new person to take his place. They proposed the principal who won the election by three votes over the teacher who had previously led the race. This woman in turn preferred to leave the school after losing the race. Thus the following year, just the morning coordinator who finished third continued to work in the school.

The fact that this coordinator stayed was an important factor in clarifying the diversity of interests and opinions among the teachers in the everyday running of the school, especially in terms of using school space and equipment. Given the divergence of opinions, the principal after some negotiation chose to give in to the wishes of the employees in order to become closer to those who had opposed her candidacy.

Even so, the relationship with those who were against her mandate was not easy and this had a considerable influence on the first few months of the principal's mandate. The main conflicts that the principal had, however, were with the coordinator who also competed in the election. They had great difficulty in communicating, mainly due to their conflicting opinions. Whenever there arose conflicts with the opposition, the principal sought support from her "base of allies," mainly composed of teachers during the afternoon period, four teachers from the morning period and two curriculum planners – one from the morning and one from the afternoon – and some outsourced cleaning and kitchen personnel. This "base of allies" offered advice and opinions about events that occurred at school, especially those that involved what they denounced as "school politics." They offered this help especially in informal conversations in the school hallways in relation to possible measures proposed by the administration.

The influence of the community

Students and the community leader were dissatisfied, mainly due to the school having changed its location. This was the reason for concern on the part of the TAC (Technical-Administrative Corps made up of curriculum planners and supervisors) and the teachers, because everyone knew that the community had influence on the decisions taken in this educational institution. Thus it was agreed in the beginning of the academic year that the school's teachers and employees would talk again with the community to try to gain its support.

In this sense, whenever it was possible, the principal maintained an informal dialogue with some members of the community to "protect" the school's management from the constant barrage of "cell phone calls" which occurs in the school community. This was mainly designed to avoid protests or an increase in complaints about issues involving the school buses, for example, and "shield" the school from stronger responses from the community leader. The relationship of the principal with this person exhibited an interesting dynamic in which the principal "suffered" in her relationship with him, because she perceived him at times as a fundamental ally for the school's progress, and gave ground on some policy issues, because she knew that he had worked at the school, was influential in the community, and was using his position to further his re-election as community leader in the elections that were to be held in the middle of 2015.

The behavior and social problems of the community also interfered in the manner in which the principal and other school employees worked. Gossip and conflicts with people from the neighborhood were heard of almost every day in school. When

these situations arose, it was up to the school employees to try to smooth over any misunderstandings through an almost constant dialogue with parents and students.

The influence of the central educational body

It can also be clearly seen that the actions taken by the principal were strongly related to the central educational body – the Municipal Secretariat of Education – Seme. Two important situations symbolize the dynamics of this relationship. The first was the resistance that the principal displayed towards Seme, mainly in her attempts to ratify or increase the school's autonomy. This resistance took various forms, such as: 1) not participating in training offered by the central body– the content of the continuous training was considered insufficient or distant from the school's reality; 2) repairing equipment without the approval of the school board – the formalizing of the board took approximately five months, because Seme was late in updating the school's new address; 3) the utilization of the principal's husband's voluntary services to repair school equipment and materials, given that it was impossible to make purchases within the legal process established by Seme, because there was no board during the beginning of the mandate.

It is important to point out that the employees of Seme knew about the above mentioned actions taken by the school management. However, even though she was advised that what she was doing was not legal, the principal maintained her position, because if she didn't make these decisions, the school's functioning would have been harmed. From her point of view and the point of view of other school employees, the guidance given by the central body was vague and did not take into account what was happening in the school. In this instance, it was obvious that this was an "us" (school) vs. "them" (Seme) dynamic.

The second situation that characterized the relationship between the principal and the central body had to do with the problem created by the school busing provided by Seme, which only transported students in grades 1 and 2. This fact during her days as head of the school's administration, led the principal to perceive that she would not be able to handle the parents' dissatisfaction by herself. That's why she needed the support of someone within Seme, which was strongly present in the meeting with the parents at the end of February, which featured a debate about whether it would be possible to make more buses available for student transport.

During this meeting, the principal said little, because the TAC and the teachers had already made it plain that restricting busing to just two grades was problematic. However, this bothered some members of Seme, who began to think that this reflected the principal's favoring of the community over the educational system. As a result, in the days that followed, these same members of Seme knowing the situation that the school found itself in, received official letters asking them to explain in writing why there was still no school board for this educational institution.

On the other hand, when she had doubts about presenting the school's accounts, for example, the principal generally called Seme. Through this help, the principal stated that these Seme technical specialists helped her "find a path through the stones." Thus, her relationship with Seme was quite dynamic. On one hand, the interference of the central body "harmed" management; on the other hand it was "positive." During the first days of her administration, these ties were more difficult and marked by conflict. However, as unexpected events occurred which were difficult for school employees to solve, the principal managed to construct, together with members of Seme, a relationship that helped her daily work, even though there continued to be disagreements.

Data Analysis: the Context of School Management and its Procedural-Relational Nature

The strong relational nature of management that influences a principal's work was always very present. This could be seen in the conversations and venting that went on between her and other people in the school, independent of whether they were members of the "opposition" or her "base of allies." Until the end of April, the non-existence of the school board, one of the channels for participation, consultation and deliberation relating to school management (LÜCK, 2011; VELOSO, CRAVEIRO and RUFINO, 2012; DRABACH and SOUZA, 2014), considerably limited her work. Even so, the non-existence of this channel demonstrated that the management of a school encompasses the actions of various actors in such a way that the school principal depended considerably on others in her daily school decision making (DRABACH and MOUSQUER, 2009). Without this body, the principal was not able to address various teacher requests, such as air conditioning for classrooms or the purchase of new computers, for example. It also made it impossible for her to hire people to make emergency repairs to problems in the kitchen, the water tank, doors, closets and water fountains.

In the same manner, the relationships with the parents, students and the community leader were almost always permeated by complaints, venting, emotions and requests for help. There were many issues related to drugs, violence, and a lack of housing or complaints about private fights between neighborhood families. Her relationship with the community leader in particular was more troubled, often because the interests of this actor diverged from the interests of school members. It is important to point out that the diffuse objectives of the relationship between community leaders and representatives of public schools are aspects that have already been discussed by Paro (2010).

Given so many differences, the principal was not always able to address peoples' complaints. This being so and given the political nature of school management (SOUZA, 2012; VARGAS and JUNQUILHO, 2013), she ended up being exposed to a series of pressures and expectations that came from the school community: "the classroom needs to be more pleasant for both teachers and students" (Morning teacher), "I need to work with better equipment" (Administrative assistant), "we couldn't have class because the school didn't have water" (Coordinator) and "miss, water's not coming out of the water fountain" (4th grade student). The central educational body maintained rules: "classes must operate normally" and "repairs cannot be made without the school board's consent," for example. Faced with these comments and the everyday practices and various interests involved in the school environment (DRABACH and MOUSQUER, 2009; PARO, 2010), the principal often felt insecurity, sadness and anguish.

One of the ways she found of dealing with these issues was using "tricks," "patches" or "the invention of new ways out," expressions utilized by Ferraço (2007) and Ferraço and Alves (2015) to highlight the unconventional character of the public school environment in Brazil, here appropriated for school management. An example of the use of these "tricks" based on field data was the alternative she found for fixing equipment without the approval of the school board using the voluntary services of her husband. Another example was the way in which the principal constantly sought dialogue with the school community and the central education body to find solutions, new or not, which could alleviate the emergencies which arose at the school, an aspect which from the point of view of Cunliffe (2014) and Watson (2005) is central to the *managing* process. In both instances, she needed to treat complex and interrelated aspects as well as various emotions and intersubjectivity which, from the point of view of Tengblad (2012) and Cunliffe (2001, 2014, 2016), arise from relationships between people. They are "tricks" that are constructed socially to solve everyday challenges for the school's management which are not described in any administration manual provided by the Ministry of Education System.

This therefore demonstrates the idea of *managing* (CUNLIFFE, 2014, 2016), which is the emergent and fluid character of management as a (re)constructed social phenomenon. Distinct from something given *a priori*, it is a daily "task" based on interrelationships between members of the school community, which requires the participation of more than one actor in decision making as well as a manner to deal with a plurality of emotions and interests (LÜCK, 2011). To a great extent, this occurs because the management process unfolds based on episodes which occur in the community and end up "arriving" at the school. Issues that occur in the community, even though they are private and "external" ("I fight [mother] with her because she [a neighbor] acts as if she's so hot and makes fun of us when we take the bus"; "We've [some students] received death threats"; "I [community leader] am concerned about my re-election in the neighborhood"), end up involving spaces, people and locations related to school management such as the functioning of buses, student safety, registration, the community leader, parents and students. Thus based on the understanding of Czarniawska (2013), it is possible to argue that the management process is never something that ends with the school, because it always involves the appearance of unexpected occurrences inherent in the complexity of the school environment (FERRAÇO, 2007; FIORIO, LYRIO and FERRAÇO, 2012).

In this way, the context within which school management occurs impedes it being "shielded" from these episodes, and it is possible to consider the management process as not being restricted just to events that occur internally in the school. In truth, it is involved in a constant process of construction and reconstruction to the extent that organizational actors have emergencies, judgments or interactions (CUNLIFFE, 2001, 2014, 2016; CZARNIAWSKA, 2013; WATSON, 2005; SHOTTER and TSOUKAS, 2014) that affect the practice of school management. In this sense, for example, the *managing* of the school examined was affected by the fact that the representatives of the TAC, teachers and other employees felt sad, preoccupied or irritated and incorporated through what they heard, perceived and saw, the consequences of all of these private and social problems that characterized the school's external community.

Even so, after several months the principal managed to construct a good relationship with this community. She sought to count on the support of parents whenever possible, especially when she told the neighborhood of the decision that the buses would be used only for children in the 1st and 2nd grades. However, the construction of a good relationship with the

community leader was the most impressive thing that occurred during this *shadowing*. Using “good neighbor” practices and persuasion, the principal was able to deal with the unexpected occurrences that arose due to the actions of this individual. Even though the first contacts in this relationship were difficult, from March onward they become something “easier” to administrate, as she described it.

These findings articulate what Watson (2001) emphasizes as a manager’s constant process of *becoming*. It is possible to highlight the continual process of becoming a manager and *managing* as a process (WATSON, 2001; CUNLIFFE, 2014, 2016) that encompasses important aspects. They are related to understanding that school management as an organizational process (CZARNIAWSKA, 2013) that cannot be viewed in an isolated manner that does not consider the political relationships and power disputes that are constructed in a school (PARO, 2010; SOUZA, 2012) through the multiple interests of the teachers, the central educational body and the community, as well as conflicts with the “opposition” and the desire of the community leader to be re-elected, for example.

Seeking to get closer to the employees of Seme, the principal asked for the help of the school coordinators to administrate the problems and unforeseen occurrences that arose in this educational institution, especially those related to the use of the buses and presenting the school’s accounts. Even though many in the school, including the principal herself, believed that Seme, as the central educational body made “cabinet decisions” that led to so many problems, faced with the difficulties of dealing with political plots and networks, such as power disputes as well as various points of view and the individual objectives inherent in the everyday existence of the school, it was necessary to have someone from Seme help in the school’s decision making.

This assistance demonstrates that, while the principal found it difficult to deal with the plurality of interests, actions, projects and subjectivity of the community (FERRAÇO, 2007; PARO, 2010; SOUZA, 2012), she would not have been able to conduct her actions in a manner that was separate from this distributed relational context (CUNLIFFE, 2001, 2014; 2016; DIAMOND and SPILLANE, 2016). On the contrary, to the extent that being a school principal is a practice that depends on contextual and relational issues, the process of school management, utilizing the ideas of Cunliffe (2001, 2014), has an intimate connection with the feelings, dialogue and the ethical and reflexive activities that permeate this environment. As a consequence, using the ideas of Paro (2010) and Vargas and Junquilha (2013), it is important to emphasize that the principal ended up walking a “tightrope” when she had to deal with the various interests, subjectivity, and relational difficulties (TENGBLAD and VIE, 2012; SHOTTER and TSOUKAS, 2014) that existed between the school community and Seme.

CONCLUSION

The objective that has guided this article is **to understand how public school management can be characterized as a relational and emergent process**. Thus, we have considered school management to be practiced by multiple people, in such a manner that a principal needs to meet the various objectives of the community that has elected this professional and the central educational body which he or she reports to. In this aspect, what makes the school under observation a unique organizational form is that it is a collective phenomenon that is fundamentally influenced by a democratic mechanism, the election of principals and the school board. This implies the appearance of aspects involving politics and power disputes that to a certain extent complicate the practice of school management. Therefore, the dynamic of school management is strongly influenced by the fact that a school has a procedural-relational character, given that it involves multiple actors, intersubjectivity, and “emergencies” and difficulties related to its everyday existence (WATSON, 2005; CUNLIFFE, 2001, 2014; SHOTTER and TSOUKAS, 2014).

Given this situation, the principal often had to walk a “tightrope,” because she had to deal with various interests and feelings within the school community and the central educational body. In other words, she was involved in the constant process of becoming a manager faced with everyday emergencies (WATSON, 2001, 2005). To a large extent this occurs because the decisions taken by a school involve other people in addition to the principal, who is formally the individual responsible for its management. Moreover, she had to constantly deal with paradoxical and ambiguous issues, given that the interests and objectives of the school were almost always diffuse, which often left her “sitting on the fence.”

Therefore, these are elements that have a significant impact on the work of a school principal. Based on the ideas of Paro (2010), Shotter and Tsoukas (2014) and Tengblad and Vie (2012), the principal experienced, based on her relationships with other individuals, a series of dilemmas critical moments, and relational difficulties. Faced with these everyday situations and

through her interactions with other people, she was *becoming* the principal and learning how to manage the school. In other words management always involves “emergencies” and is a constant process of *becoming*, which strengthens the importance of understanding managerial work and management through the concept of *managing* (CUNLIFFE, 2014; WATSON, 2001, 2005).

It is precisely in regard to this aspect that this article has sought to advance studies of school management by discussing this phenomenon beyond the notion rooted in the characteristics of *management*. Therefore, instead of emphasizing that school management is something finished and defined through pre-defined functions or a rational activity designed to achieve specific functions, or a rational activity designed to meet specific ends in the face of its plural nature, we consider school management to be a continual, relational process in keeping with the ideas of Watson (2001, 2005) and Cunliffe (2001, 2014). We believe that this perspective is better able to describe and discuss the uncertain, complex and plural characteristics already pointed out by the literature on democratic management in public schools (PARO, 2010; LÜCK, 2011; SOUZA, 2012; DRABACH and SOUZA, 2014), because this reflects this phenomenon as a constant process of becoming, being situated and transitory, and the product of constant dialogue, interactions and experiences with emergencies and critical moments in an everyday school environment. In other words, we consider school management to be a process of *managing* (CUNLIFFE, 2014).

Based on these findings, future studies can investigate *managing* in public schools, considering the management process and managerial work to be situated within a socially constructed dynamic and the fruit of a reflexive, responsive and ethical process (CUNLIFFE, 2014, 2016), which affects and is affected by the school community. A focus on this approach can help understand the construction of managerial practices and leadership in public schools, based not only on the roles and profiles of principals, but also on the complete context within which school management occurs.

Moreover, the idea of *managing* has become fundamental to the study of public schools in Brazil, considering that due to legal definitions, ever since the Federal Constitution of 1988, the management of public schools has been based on the practice of democracy. In other words, a public school, the *locus* of this article, is a social phenomenon that is practiced in a participative manner jointly by the school community, composed of teachers, administrative employees, parents, students and local community leaders. Within this political-administrative context, the principal is not a manager who applies pre-conceived formulas from *management* manuals, but rather someone who is forced to (re)construct everyday management practices in a collective manner, which here is treated as *managing*, an approach which can further organizational studies of public school management in Brazil.

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