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CHALLENGES AND COMPETENCIES IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE FUNCTION: THE VIEW OF A SCHOOL SUPERVISOR ON THE WESTERN BORDER OF SOUTHERN BRAZIL

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Abstract: This paper is a report of the experience of a supervisor who works at a public school in the western border of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, with approximately 800 students enrolled. The report is qualitative in nature and covers topics such as school planning, challenges, skills, work autonomy, but mainly, the pedagogical practice in school supervision. For each of the topics mentioned, articles were sought that reference the report. Supervision is not yet a regulated profession, and therefore faces some obstacles in the performance of the function, such as lack of autonomy. However, it provides learning about school management and human resources. The report provides some examples of conditions for the success of the function and also explains that moments of pedagogical training are extremely rich in exchanging knowledge and strengthening the emotional bond between teachers and the management team. These actions are essential to stimulate the good progress of school planning, aiming at student learning and encouraging teachers to belong to the group/school, thus facilitating teaching practice and collaborating both in the teaching and learning of all school actors.

Keywords: Pedagogical Coordination, experiences, school planning.

INTRODUCTION

School supervision is referred to by many people as “the heart of the school”. This fact can lead to the interpretation that it is through the work of school supervision that the school community is able to make its activities flow. The cardiovascular system is complex and composed of many organs (BRÖCKELMANN, 2013), which work together and tirelessly. Analogously, school sectors need to work together, otherwise there will be some failure in the system that can cause serious damage to the school’s “health”.

Just as the heart pumps blood, making it circulate throughout the body, supervision has the role of driving school activities, but it is not able to perform alone the work that must be developed by the other school actors.

This article is based on the experience report of a school supervisor who worked in this role for six years, in a public school in the state network, in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS). The supervisor is responsible for elementary school classes (final years) and high school classes in one shift. According to the report, the article seeks to understand and discuss, based on other articles, the day-to-day practice of pedagogical coordination, as well as the challenges, skills and frustrations faced during the performance of the role.

The school where the report was collected is located in an urban area, has around 800 (eight hundred) students enrolled and serves elementary school students (initial and final years) as well as high school students, in the city of São Gabriel/RS. It has a large built area, as well as a garden, a tree-lined courtyard, sports courts, a library, a science laboratory, a teachers’ room, an employee room, a cafeteria and auditoriums. It is a school that was built in the 1970s, through PREMEN: Program for the Expansion and Improvement of Education and works with projects that aim at the comprehensive education of students (PINTO and SEPEL, 2021). The general objective of this study is to learn about the day-to-day life of a school supervisor, to share the information obtained and to stimulate reflection on the role of the pedagogical coordinator in the school. In addition, to provide possible suggestions – after discussion with other authors that can be used to facilitate the routine activities of school supervisors in general.

It is considered that the work of the school supervisor, despite being fundamental to the functioning of schools, is not valued, nor

regulated. Therefore, it is necessary to bring the subject up for debate, reflection and scientific dissemination, because by doing this reflection, with a theoretical basis, it may be that at some point we will be able to obtain the regulation and appreciation so desired by teachers, in all areas that they work within the school environment.

THEORETICAL BASIS

How does a teacher become a school supervisor? Unless someone has taken a public exam to become a specialist in education, becoming a supervisor can happen through an invitation from the school administration. In that case, it will be necessary to specialize in order to take on the role. The invitation is usually made to a teacher who stands out in the performance of his/her duties, and when the opportunity arises, he/she is invited to be part of the management team. Therefore, putting your best into everything you do, when performing the teaching activity, can have your value recognized (even if it is not in monetary terms). Alarcão (2002, p.234) corroborates this idea, saying that “the supervisor is, in essence, a teacher, but a teacher with added value”.



Figure 01: Guidance for students to participate in the Gaucho High School Trails Fair: responsibility of school supervision.

Source: Own author (2021).

This “added value” that Alarcão (2002) spoke about is based on skills that the professional who holds this position must have. Namely, the skills considered most relevant for the good performance of the role: interpretative skills, analytical and evaluation skills, skills for dynamizing training and relational skills (MAIO; SILVA; LOUREIRO, 2010).

Each of these skills will be used in the most varied moments and situations of the daily life of the position, whether when receiving documents (and the flow of documents that are dealt with is not small, coming from the sponsor, the school’s own secretary, and other educational institutions), or when organizing events and pedagogical training, or when holding pedagogical meetings, or when maintaining contact with colleagues on the management team and other fellow teachers, or when contacting classes of students, or when participating in meetings with the school board or when participating in meetings with parents and/or guardians of students. Ultimately, it is not possible to list all the moments that a school supervisor goes through, or rather, the most diverse experiences lived, each one mobilizing different skills to help resolve the situations that arise.

In this same line, and according to the same authors, it is necessary to have the ability to understand reality, analyze events, evaluate projects and performances, encourage collaborative learning and have good communication skills. Today, more than ever, in the information society, it is necessary to act actively so that students do not become “databases”, as Almeida (2008) told us. However, for them to be able to transform the information obtained into knowledge, the school must be able to “respond to this multifaceted reality”, in the words of Maio, Silva and Loureiro (2010). If the student is able to recognize when the information is

reliable, and can use it critically, we will have achieved the primary objective of education: to contribute to student learning. Thus, Souza et al (2017) state that part of the duties of the teacher and school supervisor is the “social function of socialization and construction of knowledge”, knowing that this is not an easy task. It is true that the work of the school supervisor depends on the skills listed, but also on the autonomy that is given to him/her to put his/her ideas into practice, especially ideas related to the continuing education of the teaching staff (LIMA and ALTHAUS, 2016). And this time and space, for moments of reflection with the teaching staff to occur, are not always easy to obtain. Since, as Ribeiro and Marques (2020) tell us, “the autonomy of the teaching supervisor is a relative element”. The same authors emphasize that the required autonomy does not mean “each person does what they want”, but rather demonstrating commitment to the school and school community in their planning and actions, so that truly reflective moments occur on the part of teachers and school administrators.

In the report of the supervisor discussed in this article, it was possible to perceive that there is a “game of vanity” within the school environment, in which one person wants to demonstrate that they have more decision-making power than the other. And they make a point of demonstrating this in public, even if these situations imply preventing or reducing meeting times between teachers. In addition to the environment within the school itself, one cannot fail to mention the impositions of the maintaining authority, in which documents and the filling out of forms and spreadsheets are requested in a short period of time. Which, in turn, ends up hindering the work of school supervision, and consequently the planning that would assist in more effective teaching and learning processes. In this sense, Felice and Felice (2015) found that:

The lack of criteria for the profession's activity is pointed out as one of the main reasons for the frustration of supervisors, since they carry out activities in various sectors of the school, from pedagogical to administrative, in a way that does not allow them to carry out the activities that, in fact, their profession requires: mediation between pedagogical processes.

Thus, we already have a challenge: dealing with the “ego” of the various actors present in the school environment; and a frustration: seeing the planning of activities, which would help teachers to provide better learning for students, not being carried out.

The teaching supervisor (or pedagogical supervisor) is responsible for facilitating, mediating and acting as an interlocutor, who, when able to act this way, ends up promoting changes in the institution in which he/she works. All of this “is the result of training, in addition to its principles and values to transform, grow and fulfill its role in a reflective and dialogical practice”, citing Felice and Felice (2020). Making the time and space allocated to pedagogical training available is another challenge, since there is “a need for ongoing teacher training actions focused primarily on concrete work in the classroom, which, in addition to allowing the development of pedagogical practices, enables the promotion of the teacher's own health” (LIMA and ALTHAUS, 2016). In the words of Souza et al (2017), “the challenges faced daily by school supervision professionals are endless and, in any case, they are very diverse”. Regarding this diversity of challenges, it is worth remembering what Vasconcellos (2002, p. 36) mentioned about the way some colleagues act. It seems that they prefer to leave everything as it is, instead of suggesting changes, because they are “afraid that saying something might leave them with some task to do.” This is something we often witness in practice.

a reformulation of scientific knowledge and education on transdisciplinary and complex bases.”

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this essay is the experience report, resulting from the work in school supervision from 2015 to 2022, in a School of the State Education Network of Rio Grande do Sul.

This report is based on the reflective criticism of the reported experience, which contributes to professional performance and scientific dissemination, according to Mussi, Flores and Almeida (2021). The experience report was compared to the bibliographic research based on scientific articles mentioned in the citations and references, which relate the testimony collected by the supervisor, with data already researched. The descriptors used in the search for the articles were: school supervision and challenges, frustrations faced by the school supervisor, autonomy in the work of the supervisor, functions and competences of the school supervisor, precariousness of teaching work, the role of the school supervisor. After reading and filing the articles, the content analysis of this material was carried out, in order to be able to discuss the data of the experience report with the data obtained from the articles. Thus, this work had a qualitative approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 01 shows results that may be useful in facilitating the work of a school supervisor, based on experiences already experienced by someone who has already performed the role. As Larrosa (2014) said, this is “experienced knowledge”. Based on the report, experiences in school supervision will be mentioned, which highlight the challenges faced, decision-making and the preparation of documents that facilitate the work.

In addition to the challenges and frustrations in performing the role, there is also the precariousness of teaching work, in its multiple formats, as Sampaio and Marin (2004) rightly listed: the excessive “work and teaching workload, class size and teacher/student ratio, teacher turnover/itinerancy in schools and issues regarding careers in teaching.” These are some of the factors that we can mention, in addition to the disappointments caused by unfinished plans. Plans that are made with great availability and care. Affection for the work itself, for the students, for fellow teachers, and for the lack of opportunities that prevent them from being put into practice, according to the report collected. When the professional sees her ability to do her best within her role curtailed, she feels frustrated. However, she must not lose heart, because it is imperative that we strive for the pillars of education that we cannot forget: learning to learn, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to be (DELORS et al, 1996).

It is observed that it is in learning to be that another part of the report is anchored, when realizing that the role of school supervisor is not only made up of bad moments. It was reported that when pedagogical training takes place, within the previously planned plan, the moments of meeting and exchanging knowledge with colleagues, the moments of speaking and listening, are very enjoyable and beneficial for teaching practice.

At the end of this section, we would like to remind you that with good will and knowledge, obstacles can be overcome. This way, we can contribute to improving the teaching and learning conditions of our students.

In the words of Almeida (2008):

“(…) it is necessary to point out that the reconnection of knowledge and an ecology of ideas will not come about through research recipes from the numerous methodology manuals. It is from a subject imbued with the desire for metamorphosis that we can expect

Challenges	Conditions for success
To work together with the management team and educational guidance.	To establish and assist in compliance with coexistence rules.
To charge colleagues who don't meet deadlines.	To set deadlines for submission of documents by fellow teachers.
Dependence on school management.	To set a meeting schedule.
To write and carry out the required activities, and collect signatures on minutes.	Document all activities carried out with teaching staff and support for students and guardians in minutes.
To remember to perform your duties in training and meetings, and also take photos.	Record moments of pedagogical meetings through photos.
Always be in contact with fellow teachers.	Keep contact lists with colleagues up to date.
To have a good relationship with the coordination/direction of the courses that send interns.	Receive, forward and manage supervised curricular internships.
There is not always reciprocity in relationships with colleagues.	Use common sense and empathy when addressing colleagues, trying to maintain a good relationship.

Table 01: Challenges for school supervisors X conditions for success in the role.

Source: Own author (2023).

According to Table 1, some conditions for success in the role of school supervision are mentioned. As Lima and Althaus (2016) stated, we need “actions (...) focused primarily on concrete work in the classroom”, and also on concrete work in pedagogical supervision. Below, we detail these conditions and challenges, with the aim of helping colleagues who are starting out in the role:

- establishing and assisting in the fulfillment of coexistence rules requires a good relationship with the management team, employees and a partnership with educational guidance, in order to disseminate and enforce the coexistence rules previously established in the school regulations;

- setting deadlines for submission of documents by fellow teachers, as well as the format in which these documents must be submitted – if necessary, provide templates; and if necessary, hold colleagues accountable for not submitting documents on time, since this hinders the smooth running of the supervisory work;

- establishing a meeting schedule; which depends on the entire management team and authorization from the school administration, and needs to be discussed so that the times and spaces organized allow for the attendance of most of the teaching staff;

- document all activities carried out with the teaching staff and assistance to students and guardians in minutes; record the moments of pedagogical meetings through photos (in addition to recording them in minutes);

- keep contact lists with colleagues updated (email, telephone), this is essential for sending documents, messages, etc., to facilitate communication. An e-mail group for official documents and a WhatsApp group (or another messaging application) for messages and announcements that require a quick response and easy dissemination;
- receive and manage supervised curricular internships, since undergraduates from a wide range of courses will be coming to the school to do the internship, and it is necessary to check whether the Higher Education Institution (IES) from which they come has an agreement with the sponsor, and whether they brought – or were sent by email – the necessary documentation (cover letter and commitment agreement, etc.);

- file documents, remembering that archiving documents is not only physical, there is also the archiving of digital documents, which is equally important.

Some contributions from remote teaching, and no less important, that can be maintained are online meetings and spreadsheets created at the school to be used in class councils – which speed up the work and give more time for debate. The use of these new forms of communication has made it easier to carry out the work with colleagues and has streamlined the time spent on the bureaucratic part of supervision. And according to Felice and Felice (2015), supervision must facilitate teaching work. Thus, the tools mentioned are useful for compiling the necessary information in one of the most extensive and relevant parts of the supervisory activity, bureaucracy.

No less important is the organization and recording of pedagogical meetings, which need to have a well-defined beginning, middle and end. This is yet another challenge for school supervision (Souza et al, 2017). Therefore, the following is suggested as a schedule for pedagogical meetings: i) have an opening moment, with a quick or dynamic message, lasting no more than 10 minutes; ii) in the second moment the more objective part of the meeting, lasting longer, trying not to exceed 40 minutes; iii) a moment to conclude the meeting, with the necessary guidelines and models of what needs to be done to be delivered to the supervisor (if applicable). If possible, do not hold meetings that are too long, as this becomes tiring and unproductive. The ideal time would be no more than one hour, according to the experience reported here.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding the work of the school supervisor within its context is essential to understanding how important it is for this role to be regulated. Considering the supervisor's speech in relation to the articles read, the aspects mentioned corroborate with the research conducted previously. These studies support the regulation of the profession of school supervisor, which points out the lack of autonomy of this professional in institutions – despite the relevance and importance of their work, which states that it is necessary to provide the tranquility, time and spaces necessary for the supervisor to perform his/her role adequately.

Despite having good will and knowledge, the work of the supervisor is not always valued and recognized within the school environment. However, when given the opportunity, it provides very pleasant and useful moments, as well as an exchange of knowledge between the management team and teaching staff. These practices strengthen emotional bonds and the feeling of belonging to the school/group, which promotes the smooth running of school activities in general.

Regulating the profession of supervisor would be an excellent step forward in education, but it would not be the solution to all problems. Therefore, regulation alone is not enough. Simply pointing out the conditions for success in the position, although useful, is not enough. A change in attitude and thinking is needed, from the sponsor, management teams, teaching staff, and the school community in general. We need to become aware so that, even after an unexpected moment in human history (the COVID-19 pandemic), we are able to continue socializing and learning. Only after continuing to learn can we continue to teach, because no one teaches what they do not know.

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