

## The School Principal in Brazil and the Expectations of His or Her Performance in the Light of the Different Currents of School Administration

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### Abstract.

The present paper aims to discuss, in a historical perspective, the identity of the school principal in Brazil in the light of the different currents of thought of the school administration. It is considered that from the moment that a complexification of the school institution occurs, especially when education becomes a significant element of social and economic development and starts to be considered as a social and universal right, there is an increase in the rationalization of administrative processes in schools. This reality is no different in Brazil and in this way the studies that have been developed in the rest of the world promote reflexes in the practices, theories and identity of the school principals, mainly from the 30's when many of the administrative theories are brought by Brazilian educators. The reflection presented here is the result of a bibliographic and documentary research, which has as source documents on the Brazilian educational policy related to the establishment of the functions attributed to the school principal and texts by Brazilian and international educators about the subject. As a conclusion, the differences in the profile of the principal, ranging from a purely bureaucratic, centralized, to a more decentralized and participatory performance within the perspective of democratic management. In the meantime, it was observed that, currently, the profile of the school principal is linked to a managerial perspective, related to the overvaluation of performativity as a technique or skills to obtain systems efficiency.

**Keywords:** Professional identity; school principals' profile; school administration

### Introduction

This paper analyzes the construction of the identity of the principal of basic schools in Brazil, taking as a reference the job specifications from the moment the theories of school administration gain momentum, mainly due to the systematization of the knowledge of business administration, because only gradually did the specificity of the administration of schools become detached from the administration applied to other institutions.

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In this study, we considered that the identity of the school principals is closely related both to the legislation that establishes their formal responsibilities and to the concrete performance in the school reality, where these rules take shape. Thus, we considered that the school principal's identity is built on the subjectivity of everyday interactions, as well as by the established educational policies.

The concept of identity we adopted in this work is close to that established by Dubar, who considers that the “identity of any empirical being depends on the time considered and the point of view adopted” (Dubar, 2006, p. 8). Identity is understood as a socially constructed process, through relationships, not being a fixed attribute of a person, but a phenomenon susceptible to variations according to the social changes that occur in the reference groups with which it maintains a link of belonging. As factors that influence this constitutive process, social experiences lived in different contexts, subjective relationships and the image conferred by third parties are included.

From this perspective, we considered that the identity creation and recreation arrangement involve both the changes that have taken place in the individual's professional and personal trajectory, as well as the effects of the transformations that have taken place in the social and historical context in which he is located.

Thus, we understand that the concept of identity carries the idea of uniqueness and collectivity, which allows us to infer that such conception usually refers to the way the subject defines himself and how he is defined by others in their relationships. In the different plans of space and time.

The establishment of the function of school principal in Brazil, in a perspective of an education specialist, had its great development mainly from the 50's, with the dissemination of the studies brought by José Querino Ribeiro, inspired very strongly by the north studies Americans in the area. Although, in the 1930s, both José Querino Ribeiro, with the book *Fayolismo in the Administration of Public Schools*, published in 1938, and Anísio Teixeira already brought reflections on school administration, it was only from the 1950s that it asserted itself as more systematized knowledge (Adam, 2011).

In the State of São Paulo, it was from 1958 that, gradually, the requirement for a diploma in the school administrator course was established as a minimum qualification for enrollment in the principal's competition (Cortina, 1999). Until then, what prevailed was the appointment or the competition for director of the teacher with experience in teaching.

In this sense, the identity of the school principal will be analyzed in the light of the different historical moments and the attributions established to these professionals and how the administrative theories inspired the expectation of their performance and identity.

### **The school principal in Brazil, the theories of school administration and the identities of this professional.**

Administrative theories had a considerable advance, as systematized knowledge, mainly with the industrial development and the complexification of the productive processes and of the society, mainly due to the migration from the countryside to the cities. Much has already been written and reflected on the issue of the complexification of the school institution, with the access of the masses to education, which was accompanied by the development of

administrative theories, elaborating its body of knowledge, mainly in the late 1930s and early 1940s. When referring to this aspect, Glass (2004) states that:

The behavioral and social sciences after World War II began to exert a strong influence on the field of educational administration and its textbooks. Leading educational-administration professors considered theory and research in these fields to have direct application in administering schools. Soon social and psychological theory and research in human motivation, organizational culture, leadership, and organizational theory appeared in general textbooks. Professors with academic training in social psychology, sociology, and organizational leadership often authored these texts.

Professors with more traditional backgrounds continued publishing texts much like compendiums of best professional practices. These “cookbooks” of best practices learned through experience were perhaps more widely used in former “teacher colleges” than in major research institutions. Until the 1980s type of text continued to dominate a good portion of the textbook field (Glass, 2004, p. 5).

The prescriptive perspective of the so-called “cookbooks” cited by Glass, remained for a long time as the most adequate way to establish the practices of school administration, placing school principals as process managers whose actions were sufficient to be guided by techniques described, without taking into account human and political aspects involved in the management of a school.

When looking at the administrative theories of education in perspective, it is observed that in Brazil, the result of international reflections, we also experienced a process, until the 1980s, of uncritical and prescriptive school administration, until critical studies emerged that questioned they merely transferred business administrative methods and techniques to schools (Paro, 1998; Félix, 1984) and highlighted the political aspects involved in school administration.

In Brazil, the position of school principal has its roots even in the Republican period. State Decree no. 248 (1894), which instituted school groups in the State of São Paulo, provides for the position of school director, who would be a teacher at the normal teacher training school, appointed by the government (Cortina, 1999). According to this author, the creation of the position of director had the function of guaranteeing educational reforms and overcoming the resistance of teachers to change, since they, until then, had excessive didactic autonomy. Government centralization and the disintegration of local and provincial nuclei, mentioned by Faoro (1984), are felt at this moment. The need for a figure to guarantee reforms and represent the state is materialized in the position of director. The Republic that was now established needed to guarantee a minimum of centralization of State policies.

From then on, the rupture between the task of educating and managing the school is established, characterizing the identity of the school principal as a specialist and representative of the State to guarantee the reforms.

In the State of São Paulo, Decree no. 5,884 (1933), which instituted the Education Code of the State of São Paulo, started to provide a competition for titles and exams to fill the position of director of a school group, maintaining the requirement of four hundred days of teaching for the purposes of enrolling in the competition. . It can be observed that from the

implementation of competitions to fill the position of principal, the idea of a specific training for the school principal starts, attested not only by the legitimation of a knowledge acquired through the practice of teaching, but also for the theoretical knowledge in administration and the theories of school administration. Thus, it is not enough to have the experience of teaching, as administrative knowledge becomes an important theme in this context and in the definition of the identity of the school principal.

The pioneers in this discussion and production of school administration theories in Brazil were José Querino Ribeiro and Manoel Lourenço Filho, who had significant influence not only from business administration theorists, such as Taylor and Fayol, but also from authors who had already developed a theory school administration. Authors such as Ellwood Cubberley (1922), Jesse Sears (1950) and Arthur Moehlman (1951), from the North American school administration area, had an influence on the works of Querino Ribeiro and Lourenço Filho (Ribeiro & Ma-chado, 2007) .

The perspective of production in school administration in this period can be considered as rational-bureaucratic, in the Weberian conception of the term, insofar as it presented normative aspects of school organization, as well as bureaucratic processes that turned to efficiency, control and repetition of procedures. In addition, as I stated earlier, teacher training and practice was not enough, requiring specific training, containing administrative knowledge.

As the school became more complex and consciously responsible, its human and material needs grew and disappeared: they grew due to the multiplication and variety of functions to be performed; for that very reason and more because of the consequent need for careful and time-consuming preparation, selection and maintenance of these elements. Hence its structure and functioning can no longer develop at random, but require a systematization of precautions capable of guaranteeing the unity of objectives and the rationalization of functioning (Ribeiro, 1978, p. 59).

In this sense, the principal's identity in the rational-bureaucratic perspective is that of the manager, who ensures the proper functioning of the school and the compliance with the educational policy and rules established by the government, taking care that all processes are controlled and carried out with the utmost efficiency, therefore, as Querino Ribeiro states: “private companies found in management studies the elements to remove their difficulties arising from social progress and the school needed nothing more than to be inspired by them to solve theirs” (Ribeiro, 1978, p. 60).

Although the writings of Lourenço Filho are later than those of Querino Ribeiro, already in the 50's, and have organizational psychology as a reference, as this was already well developed, the rational-bureaucratic perspective remains in his theoretical productions.

In the study of the school as an organization, Lourenço Filho highlights the need for planning, bureaucratic structure and control of organizational dynamics as a precondition for its good functioning. It also highlights the influence of the structure of society on the school organization, introducing the use of systems theory as an analytical tool for the study of school organization and administration. Finally, he discusses the structural importance of the legislative context to resolve conflicts in educational organizations. In

this sense, one of Lourenço Filho's contributions to the study of the organization and administration of education is precisely the formalization of the educational structure and its legal and administrative procedures. (Ribeiro & Machado, 2007, p. 22)

As stated by Dubar (2006), identity depends on the time considered and the point of view adopted, as it is a socially constructed process. Thus, the rational-bureaucratic identity of the school principal is the result of different elements that define it, and it can be said that these elements are linked to both political and academic issues, in the sense of the production of knowledge that underlies the practice of these professionals.

Thus, following the advances in human and social sciences, as well as the evolution of technology, administrative theories and school administration reflect such issues, establishing identities that permeate practices and that take a long time to promote changes.

An example of this situation is that the institution of competitions as an innovation in the way of choosing directors did not change the clientelistic practices that had their origin in the Old Republic. In the Republic of 30, education was still an instrument of personal favoring and enticement, transforming appointments, transfers and pensions into political commodities, dependent on the ruling party and not a right, merit or the Weberian perspective of attributing the position by technical competence.

In this way, it is observed that the director's identity in this context reflects the patrimonialist culture of the Brazilian State, where clientelism and centralizing authoritarianism prevailed by different authors (Faoro, 1984; Mendonça, 2001). In this context, the construction of the school principal's identity has historically been linked to a pattern of behavior determined by the State, which places him as its representative. It establishes an identity of "fidelity to the king", as Faoro (1984) points out.

Thus, the discussion of the professionalization of education administration, brought mainly after the 50s, did not significantly alter the identity established for the school principal, maintaining the nomination system in much of Brazil. Pereira (1967) highlights the patriarchal vision that the community has in relation to the principal, as he is responsible for defending the interests of the establishment, avoiding all interference by families in the internal affairs of schools (1967, as quoted in Cortina, 1999, p. 114).

Both the patrimonial values present in the culture, as well as the bureaucratic and legal perspective, contributed to keep teachers and parents of students, as well as other members of the school community, away from decision-making power at school.

The rational-bureaucratic perspective served to legitimize this isolation, based on the justification of the need for specialized technical knowledge to manage schools, linking school administration theories in Brazil, for decades, to the universe of general administration theory, denying the specifics of the school organization.

The theoretical production on school administration in the 1980s highlights the conservative character of school administration in Brazil, pointing out the importance of considering the specificities of school administration in relation to administration in general, as well as its depoliticized and technical perspective. (Félix, 1984; Paro, 1998; Silva Jr., 1993). These authors emphasize that the school administration demands the permanent impregnation of pedagogical ends in their practice, emphasizing that "in the 'theoretical-technical' pole, the search for the school administration's own identity tends to bring it much closer to the 'administration' than the 'scholar'" (Silva Jr, 1993, p. 69).

Such a discussion contributed significantly to the understanding, at least at the theoretical level, that the administrative procedures to be employed at school could not be the same as those applied in companies. He also pointed out the need to recognize the specifics of the school, as well as the political and not merely technical issue involved in school administration.

Within this framework, the concept of democratic school management begins to be constructed, which later materialized in educational legislation, a discourse appropriate for the technical ideals of State reform, which took off in Brazil in the late 1980s and especially during the 90s.

In this way, the identity built and reconstructed by the school principals themselves can constitute an identity of continuity (Dubar, 2005), in contradiction with the rupture identity, as can be seen by the defense that makes an entity of principals in the State of São Paulo, UDEMO, with respect to competitions for directors. The justification presented by UDEMO leaders, in defense of the maintenance of the public competition for school principal in the State of São Paulo, is that the election would represent an advance, trying to escape from political patronage (Adam, 2011), but, according to the entity, this measure falls short of the ideal and that, unlike other states, São Paulo does not live with such reality.

It is undeniable that the public competition is a way of filling the position of director much more democratic than the appointment, avoiding clientelism. On the other hand, it bears the mark of the technician and hierarchical perspective of the director's identity, insofar as he establishes himself as a specialist, with a lifelong position, detaching himself from the figure of the educator. As stated by Silva Jr (1993), the director in this perspective is neither education nor administration, as he is distant from these two perspectives.

The defense of merit and the position of director position guarantees an identity of technical knowledge, which goes in the opposite direction to the understanding that any competent teacher of the school can manage it.

Estas afirmações, no entanto, não menosprezam o conhecimento administrativo necessário a qualquer instituição, como afirma Silva Jr (1993), nem a gerência, nem a racionalidade são

These statements, however, do not underestimate the administrative knowledge necessary for any institution, as stated by Silva Jr (1993), neither management nor rationality are antagonistic elements to the accomplishment of the educational act. What is posed is the subordination of these activities to the ends of the educational act.

Even the election for school principals has shown the difficulty in building an identity of the principal as an educator and committed to the school, although this form of appointment has promoted advances in relation mainly to places where principals were appointed.

Some experiences in Brazilian municipalities and states in which the election system for the designation of the director was adopted have been analyzed by different authors (Paro, 1996; Mendonça, 2001), who point out the obstacles found for the implementation of this proposal. One of the difficulties is the overcoming of the rational / bureaucratic view present very strongly in the educational system and its institutions. This rational / bureaucratic view contributed to the construction of an identity of the principal as the State's mandate, hindering real autonomy and participation in the school's daily life. We consider that one of the central elements in the construction of this rational / bureaucratic vision is the result of national culture, as we will discuss later.

Advancing a little in the history of the laws on filling the position of school principal in the 90s, shortly after the establishment of the current Federal Constitution in Brazil (1988) and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education - LDB (1996) we have the democratic management of education as a legal precept, bringing new perspectives on the attributions and forms of filling the position, which refer to a more democratic, less authoritarian and centralizing conception of this position.

Despite the legal determination and the advancement of discussions for a school management that was more participatory and democratic, with the involvement of different actors in the school education process, such as teachers, families, students and the community, the practice did not significantly follow such precepts. What can be observed, mainly in the 2000s, is the growth of a wave of valorization of the “performativity” of schools, placing the established practices at the service of meeting the standards of international assessments of education.

Terms such as performativity and entrepreneurship have become watchwords, being presented as a central element in educational policies and proposals for improving the quality of education.

Bringing the reflection carried out by Ball (2002), it is highlighted that the notion of performativity is presented as a concept in which the center of responsibility for the failure or success of the actions put into practice falls only on the subjects, individually, or in the organizations. Organizations as isolated entities, without the context being an element considered in the process:

Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation, or even a system of ‘terror’ in Lyotard’s words that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change. The performances of – individual subjects or organizations – serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. (BALL, 2000, p. 1).

The documents produced by the São Paulo State Department of Education, which define the profiles, skills and competences required for school principals, reflect this perspective of the concept of performativity.

Examples of this guideline are the content of the latest call notices for directors of the SEE of São Paulo, the Communiqué SE of 5, December 2000 (2000), which addresses the bibliography of these competitions, Resolution SE 56, of 2016 (2016), providing on the profile, competencies and skills required of the directors, and the Operational Manual for Management Model - Socio-Educational Business Technology - Thesis (ICE, [sd]), used as a reference for both the course given to the directors approved in the competition, as for the latest call for proposals for directors and supervisors.

The idea of administrative rationality, in the perspective of a technique aimed at efficiency and effectiveness, free from “ideology”, so in vogue in the current world context, contributes to think of school management as administrative rationality aimed at a neutral performance, which does not it relates to specific contexts that demand actions specific to the realities experienced by Brazilian public schools. Thinking about school administration and the role of the school manager in this perspective clashes with the idea of democratic management, another watchword present in the speeches, texts, resolutions and in the LDB itself, falling into a void, marked discourse for the absence of practical sense.

However, such contentless manifestations produce identities and ways of being teachers and education managers, shaping the subjectivities that will standardize references and actions that have mere technical rationality as inspiration. As Ball (2005) states:

Performativity is achieved through the construction and publication of information and indicators, in addition to other institutional achievements and promotional materials, as mechanisms to stimulate, judge and compare professionals in terms of results: the tendency to nominate, differentiate and sort. Performativity, or what Lyotard also calls “context control”, is closely interlinked with attractive possibilities of a specific type of economic (rather than moral) “autonomy” for institutions and, in some cases, for individuals, such as school principals. The “autonomous” subjectivity of these productive individuals has become the main economic resource of the reformed and entrepreneurial public sector (Ball, 2005, p. 544).

Thus, it is observed that there is a return to the technician logic when the school administration has its main focus on the efficiency of the system, a system that generally ignores, in the first place, the stage in which each institution is and in the second firstly, the concrete situation of the installed process, forcing the school to have a performance with standards external to it, incompatible with its particular reality.

With this observation, it is not denying the importance of technical knowledge in administration or school administration, but replacing it in its proper place, to the extent that it will support what each school evaluates is its own concrete condition. In addition, the importance of large-scale assessments is not ignored as a measure of analyzing the progress of each school, but these must be put in perspective in view of the aforementioned context analysis.

## Conclusion

Due to the different identities generated by the theories established for school administration, identity profiles are found, ranging from the school principal as the school's unique and unquestionable authority, acting centrally, passing through the rational-bureaucratic identity, as prepositional of the state, until the idea of the director as the manager who will coordinate the task of bringing the school to efficiency and performance is arrived at.

However, we consider that there is another possibility, within the precepts of democratic management, represented by the director who has the articulating and dynamizing role of the different potentialities existing in and around the school space. This last identity, which is identified with democratic management, presupposes some principles of administrative actions by which the school principal can be guided, which would be:

a) The possibility of real participation by everyone in the school's educational process. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the school as a space for voice, not only for those directly involved in the pedagogical process, such as the principals and teachers, but also the students and their families. In the case of Brazil, it is necessary to stimulate and encourage participatory bodies, such as school councils, associations of parents and teachers and student unions, provided for in the legislation. This fact is in line with what is foreseen



in the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (1996), which places democratic education management as one of its basic principles.

b) The best assessment that can be done at school is self-assessment, which presupposes a constant self-analysis that has as its main questions the following: Who are we? As a group, are we acting in tune with what we define as your goals? Who participated in setting the goals? What actions should we take to get a collective job? Where do we want to go?

c) Large-scale assessments, generally guided by external standards that do not always take into account the local reality, should be seen as complementary information for school management and not as the main parameter, since this role should be reserved for self-assessment.

These principles presented here present an identity of the school principal that goes in the opposite direction to performativity, as discussed by Ball and Lyothard (2000), as the central point of school administration moves from pure technical efficiency, from promotion of competitiveness among peers, for an idea of a solidary and cooperative educational process, where everyone has their responsibilities and rights guaranteed.

In Brazil, one of the premises of democratic management is the greater freedom of participation and decision of the school community in the deliberations about everyday problems, through collegiate bodies, causing changes in the role of the school and raising debates regarding the performance of the principal, suggesting the construction of an identity different from the traditionally established one.

However, democratic principles and methods are far from being implemented. Elements of the national bureaucratic culture end up supporting the identity established for the director, considering his authority and his decisions as irrefutable and, thus, making it difficult to accept other opinions in the deliberations that involve school life.

There is a consensus that the practice of democratic management requires a transformation. For this to happen, it is necessary for the principal to undertake his own change, deepening the reflections on what it means to manage a school today.

In this process, it is up to the principal to initiate a dialogue with all other segments of the school community, clarifying the importance of collective participation, revisiting their identity and reflecting on their role, realizing that distributing responsibilities does not mean losing authority, but having its legitimated authority, in a healthy relationship, with prospects for gains at school, creating conditions to overcome managerialism marked by the overvaluation of performance and providing a harmonious climate, guided by an attitude of partnership and sharing of experiences, in favor of the same objective.

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