Roles and functions of school psychology: perceptions of management teams in municipal schools

Atribuições da psicologia escolar: percepções das equipes de gestão nas escolas municipais

Atribuciones de la psicología escolar: percepciones de los equipos de gestión en las escuelas municipales

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ABSTRACT
This study aimed to analyze how management teams from municipal schools in Passo Fundo, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, understand the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists. This is an empirical, qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive study conducted with 49 school administrators (principals, pedagogical coordinators, and educational counselors) from 14 municipal elementary schools. Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions, administered via Google Forms. The results indicate that school psychology is predominantly understood as focusing on students' emotional issues, conflict mediation, and guidance for students, teachers, and families. Functions related to making psychological assessments and diagnoses were also attributed to school psychologists, revealing the persistence of a remedial and individualizing conception of professional practice. It is concluded that, although there is recognition of the

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21313627

importance of psychology within the school environment, certain understandings persist that require critical examination in light of the technical and ethical frameworks of the field.
Keywords: school psychology; school management; public policies; professional practice.

RESUMO

O estudo teve como objetivo analisar como equipes de gestão de escolas municipais de Passo Fundo (RS) compreendem as atribuições da psicologia escolar. Trata-se de uma pesquisa empírica, qualitativa, exploratória e descritiva, realizada com 49 gestores/as (diretores/as, coordenadores/as pedagógicos/as e orientadores/as educacionais) de 14 escolas municipais de Ensino Fundamental. A coleta de dados ocorreu por meio de questionário semiestruturado com questões abertas, aplicado via Google Forms. Os resultados indicam que a psicologia escolar é majoritariamente compreendida como atuação voltada às questões emocionais dos estudantes, à mediação de conflitos e à orientação de alunos, professores e famílias. Também foram atribuídas funções relacionadas à realização de avaliações e diagnósticos psicológicos, evidenciando a permanência de uma concepção remediativa e individualizante da atuação profissional. Conclui-se que, embora haja reconhecimento da importância da psicologia no ambiente escolar, ainda persistem compreensões que demandam problematização à luz das referências técnicas e éticas da área.
Palavras-chave: psicologia escolar, gestão escolar, políticas públicas, atuação profissional.

RESUMEN

El estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar cómo los equipos de gestión de escuelas municipales de Passo Fundo (RS) comprenden las atribuciones de la psicología escolar. Se trata de una investigación empírica, cualitativa, exploratoria y descriptiva, realizada con 49 gestores/as (directores/as, coordinadores/as pedagógicos/as y orientadores/as educacionales) de 14 escuelas municipales de Educación Primaria. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo mediante un cuestionario semiestructurado con preguntas abiertas, aplicado a través de Google Forms. Los resultados indican que la psicología escolar es comprendida mayoritariamente como una actuación orientada a las cuestiones emocionales de los estudiantes, a la mediación de conflictos y a la orientación de alumnos, profesores y familias. También se le atribuyeron funciones relacionadas con la realización de evaluaciones y diagnósticos psicológicos, evidenciando la permanencia de una concepción remedial e individualizante de la actuación profesional. Se concluye que, aunque existe reconocimiento de la importancia de la psicología en el entorno escolar, aún persisten comprensiones que requieren problematización a la luz de las referencias técnicas y éticas del área.
Palabras clave: psicología escolar, gestión escolar, políticas públicas, actuación profesional.

1 Introduction

The enactment of Law No. 13,935/2019, which provides for the delivery of Psychology and Social Work services within public basic education systems, represents a recent milestone in regulating psychological practice in the Brazilian school context (Brazil, 2019). Despite this normative advancement, the effective inclusion of psychologists in public schools remains limited, revealing tensions between legal provisions and institutional reality. Within the theoretical field, school and educational psychology has, since the 1980s and

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21313627

1990s, undergone a process of critical revision of its practices and foundations. The creation of the Brazilian Association of School and Educational Psychology (ABRAPEE) consolidated debates regarding professional identity, the epistemological foundations of the field, and possibilities for practice grounded in preventive, collective, and contextualized perspectives (Barbosa & Marinho-Araújo, 2010).

Scholars such as Guzzo (2014) and Marinho-Araújo have emphasized the need to move beyond a remedial model centered on individual diagnosis. As noted by Moreira and Guzzo (2014, p. 43), "schools still expect a remedial model of psychology that diagnoses and cures," highlighting historical continuities that challenge the construction of a broader and more critical professional practice, particularly one capable of incorporating preventive and health- and well-being-promoting actions within the school community.

Paradoxically, even after the enactment of the legislation, the presence of psychology professionals in basic education remains limited. Data from the Brazilian School Census indicate that only 20% of municipal schools in the state of Rio Grande do Sul had psychologists in 2021 (Oliveira, 2023). In the municipality of Passo Fundo, the context of this study, there are no psychologists working in public municipal schools (Maré de Notícias, 2024). This scenario reinforces the importance of investigating how professional practice is conceptualized even prior to its concrete implementation.

Although there is a consistent body of academic literature addressing the identity and foundations of school psychology, studies analyzing management teams' perceptions of this professional's roles and responsibilities remain scarce. Considering that principals, pedagogical coordinators, and educational counselors occupy strategic positions within school organization, understanding their narratives makes it possible to identify expectations, demands, and potential tensions between anticipated practice and the ethical-technical guidelines established by the Federal Council of Psychology (CFP, 2005; 2020).

In light of this, the present study aims to analyze how management teams from municipal schools in Passo Fundo understand the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists, examining these narratives in light of the Code of Professional Ethics for Psychologists and the Technical Guidelines issued by CREPOP. The guiding research question is: how do management teams in municipal schools in Passo Fundo attribute

meaning to the roles of school psychology within the contemporary educational context?

2 Method

This is an empirical, qualitative study of an exploratory and descriptive nature, conducted in the municipality of Passo Fundo, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil (Minayo, 2009; Gil, 1987, p. 45). The research was carried out with management teams from municipal elementary schools, considering the relevance of these professionals in organizing pedagogical and institutional practices.

The study included 49 administrators from 14 municipal schools, holding positions as principals, pedagogical coordinators, and educational counselors. Participants were required to be formally serving as members of the school management team during the data collection period. Invitations were extended through institutional contact with the schools, and a WhatsApp group was created to share information about the study and distribute the link to the research instrument. All participants signed an Informed Consent Form (ICF), which was sent via email.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Atitus Educação (CAAE No. 80015924.6.0000.5319).

Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire composed of two open-ended questions, administered via Google Forms. The use of open-ended questions sought to allow participants to freely express their understandings and meanings regarding the topic, fostering the production of written narratives suitable for qualitative analysis of the meanings attributed to professional practice. The questions addressed: (1) the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists within the educational environment, and (2) the challenges to its implementation in schools. The form remained available for completion for 30 days.

Data were analyzed from the perspective of discursive practices, as proposed by Spink and Medrado (2000) and Spink and Lima (2000), who understand discourse as the socially situated production of meaning. Additionally, these authors propose the technique known as the "idea association map." This method begins with general thematic categories arranged in

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21313627

columns, into which excerpts from participants' narratives or documents are organized, seeking to avoid fragmentation and preserve the sequence of content.

The process involves an interactive movement between categories and the material arranged in the columns, allowing for the redefinition of categories throughout the analytical process. The idea association map presented in this study was developed based on the analysis of participants' narratives. Initially, a floating reading of the responses was conducted, followed by the organization of the material into units of meaning.

Subsequently, the idea association map technique was employed, structuring emergent thematic categories derived from the corpus itself. These categories were organized into analytical axes, enabling the identification of recurrences and articulations among the meanings produced by participants. The analytical process involved a continuous movement between the empirical material and the theoretical framework, allowing for the redefinition and refinement of categories throughout the analysis.

3 Results and discussion

With the approval of Law No. 13,935/2019, which provides for the delivery of Psychology and Social Work services within public basic education systems, the school environment began to open institutional space for the inclusion of these two professions. However, it is essential to distinguish between *school psychology* and *educational psychology*, fields that, although related, are not synonymous (Brazil, 2019).

According to Antunes (2008, p. 470), educational psychology constitutes a field of knowledge production aimed at understanding psychological phenomena within educational processes, whereas school psychology is configured as a field of professional practice, implementing interventions within the school setting and grounding its work primarily in the knowledge produced by educational psychology.

Thus, educational psychology seeks to understand and strengthen the teaching–learning process and is not limited to the school environment, as it produces research, theories, and methods that inform other areas, including school psychology itself. School psychology, in turn, aims to intervene directly in the educational context, promoting

improvements in institutional relationships and school climate by working with families, teachers, students, and management teams, applying in practice the knowledge produced by educational psychology.

Furthermore, Cruces (2006, p. 20) highlights that "psychology developed in Brazil primarily to address educational problems, especially teacher education." In this sense, analyzing the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists becomes fundamental to preventing reductions of their practice to individualizing demands imposed by school management, such as providing isolated services to students labeled as "problematic," while disregarding the social and institutional determinants of the school context.

The history of school psychology has undergone significant transformations. Among the central scholars for understanding this trajectory are Raquel Souza Lobo Guzzo (2014) and Claisy Maria Marinho Araújo (2010). Another relevant reference is the Technical Guidelines for Psychologists' Practice in Basic Education (CREPOP, 2019, p. 43), which emphasize that psychologists, by recognizing the multiple determinants of educational activity, should develop collective work, involving the entire school community.

In the historiographical development of school psychology in Brazil, the creation of the first metric scale of children's intelligence by Alfred Binet in 1905[3] in France stands out. As analyzed by Patto (1984), the consolidation of psychometrics profoundly marked the constitution of school psychology, influencing practices of classification and referral. The initial purpose of these tools was to identify, classify, guide, and place children who required special education.

As Lima (2005) notes, this process organized students into homogeneous groups classified as "normal" or "abnormal," defining curricular content based on this categorization. From the 1930s onward, psychology became consolidated in Brazil, particularly in the educational field. In 1962, the profession of psychologist was officially regulated, formally

[3] The Binet-Simon Intelligence Scale is a psychological assessment instrument created in 1905 by Alfred Binet and Théodore Simon in Paris. The scale has a psychopedagogical orientation and was designed to measure the mental abilities of schoolchildren in order to identify those who would be placed in special education programs. It was developed based on tasks and short tests previously designed by Binet in earlier years, and its results establish a relationship between chronological age and mental age.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21313627

structuring fields of professional practice. Subsequently, Law No. 5,692/1971 expanded compulsory and free schooling, provoking significant transformations in the educational system (Antunes, 2008).

According to Marinho-Araújo and Almeida (2005, p. 395):

> The increase in the number of students coming from diverse sociocultural backgrounds created difficulties in adapting the educational system to this new reality, both in terms of school infrastructure and in terms of conceptions and learning methodologies suited to the emerging educational context. Consequently, there was a growth in the demand involving students with learning difficulties that exceeded teachers' understanding and pedagogical interventions, which had been adjusted to the former context.

Learning difficulties began to be understood as complex phenomena, influenced by social, economic, and political factors, rather than merely individual ones. School psychological work then came to include institutional intervention strategies, involving students, families, and the school in an articulated manner. In light of this historical trajectory, it becomes relevant to understand how the Management Teams of Municipal Elementary Schools in Passo Fundo, particularly the 49 participating professionals, including principals, pedagogical coordinators, and educational counselors, perceive the current roles of school psychology.

The research was conducted with 14 management teams, totaling 49 participants. Among them, 28.6% hold the position of School Principal, 28.6% are Educational Counselors, and 42.9% are Pedagogical Coordinators. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 70 years, with a predominance between 40 and 55 years old, indicating a profile of experienced professionals. Regarding ethnic-racial self-identification, 90% identified as White and 2% as Brown (mixed race), revealing low diversity in school management, an aspect that may influence institutional perspectives and practices.

All participants held undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in different areas of Education, particularly Pedagogy, Mathematics, and Physical Education. The most frequently mentioned specializations were School Management, Educational Counseling, Psychopedagogy, and Specialized Educational Assistance (AEE). Thus, the group is qualified and possesses significant experience in the educational field. It is important to highlight that,

in the municipality of Passo Fundo, there are still no school psychologists in the public basic education system. Even so, the narratives reveal a broadened understanding, although still marked by traditional conceptions, of school psychology practice. In general, this professional role in the school environment is not restricted solely to working with students, as many teachers reported in this research.

Beyond identifying the profile of school management in the Municipal Schools of Passo Fundo, the main focus of this study was to understand and analyze these professionals' narratives regarding the roles of school psychology, recognizing the importance of psychological work in identifying and intervening in students' emotional and behavioral issues, as well as in promoting a healthy school environment. Collaboration between psychologists, teachers, and families was highlighted as a crucial factor for the success of interventions.

Based on the idea association map, the following roles and responsibilities assigned to the school psychologists were identified: 21.7% indicated work related to emotional issues; 11.8% guidance for students and teachers; 11.3% problem-solving; 10.9% addressing challenges in the school environment; 10% institutional and family support; 9.5% general assistance to the school community; 9% support in addressing the difficulties of those involved; and 6.8% promotion of improvements in the school environment.

The narratives reveal a strong emphasis on the emotional dimension. One participant highlights the importance of support in situations such as anxiety, depression, family conflicts, and bullying, associating emotional well-being with academic performance. Other statements emphasize conflict mediation and the development of socio-emotional competencies. Regarding contributions to emotional issues, one of the interviewees states:

> The increase Having psychologists in public schools is crucial to providing emotional and psychological support to students. Schools should not be merely places of academic learning, but also environments that promote students' mental well-being. With psychologists available, students have a safe space to address emotional issues such as anxiety, depression, family problems, bullying, and other challenges they may face. This can contribute not only to students' personal development but also to improved academic performance, since a healthy emotional state is directly linked to effective learning. Furthermore, psychologists can

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21313627

collaborate with teachers and parents to create a more welcoming and inclusive school environment, fostering a culture of care and mutual support (D2).

Interviewee D13 emphasizes the need to "promote listening and guidance in the various events of the school's daily life." This statement illustrates how the presence of a school psychologist can create a safe space where students and teachers feel heard and supported. CP5 states that it is the psychologist's role to "mediate conflicts and provide emotional support by carrying out activities that help develop the socio-emotional competencies of students and teachers." Here, we observe the importance of the school psychologist in conflict resolution and in strengthening socio-emotional skills, which are essential for a harmonious school environment.

Finally, interviewee OE14 refers to the "development of socio-emotional skills, among other essential functions to create a school environment where students can fully develop, both academically and emotionally." This statement summarizes well the multifaceted role of the school psychologist, which goes beyond emotional support and contributes to students' holistic development.

Additionally, some school administrators associate emotional issues with student classification through diagnoses and psychological reports and therapeutic interventions. Interviewee CP12 mentions "conducting psychological assessments to identify emotional, behavioral, and learning difficulties or disorders in students." This highlights the importance attributed to psychological evaluations for the early identification of problems that may lead to learning difficulties.

However, part of the narratives associates psychological practice with making diagnoses and individual assessments. As Patto (2002) warns, diagnoses may individualize school failure and exempt the school from its institutional responsibility. This tension reveals the coexistence of two conceptions: a broader, collective, and institutional perspective; and a traditional perspective centered on individual assessment and therapeutic referral.

Interviewee CP13, for example, states that "their functions include making psychological diagnoses, planning and implementing therapeutic and educational interventions for learning difficulties and behavioral disorders." This statement reflects how

the role of the school psychologist is perceived as comprehensive, encompassing both diagnosis and direct intervention in therapeutic and educational domains.

Furthermore, interviewee CP16 highlights the need to "identify learning problems early on," reinforcing the importance of early detection so that effective interventions can be implemented, preventing the worsening of learning difficulties.

According to Oliveira and Marinho-Araújo (2009), one of the innovations in School Psychology is precisely the active participation of teachers in the monitoring process, strengthening shared responsibility for academic success.

Regarding guidance for students and teachers, the narratives indicate the importance of qualified listening, family support, and conflict mediation. Concerning problem-solving, the presence of a psychologist is seen as strategic in addressing both family-related and institutional demands.

On the topic of guidance, interviewee D13 reiterates the importance of "promoting listening and guidance in the various events of the school's daily life," suggesting that the presence of a school psychologist can foster safe spaces for dialogue and reflection about everyday situations. Interviewee OE9 mentions the "guidance of parents and educators," reinforcing the idea that the school psychologist's role extends beyond students to include support and orientation for parents and teachers, thus building a broader support network. Finally, interviewee OE12 refers to "supporting parents by guiding them on how to deal with their children, promoting a professionally welcoming environment," highlighting the importance of assisting families in creating supportive home environments that contribute to children's emotional and academic development. These narratives demonstrate how guidance directed at students, teachers, and parents constitutes a central dimension of school psychology practice, contributing to a healthier and more collaborative educational environment.

Lastly, regarding problem-solving, management teams generally hold a positive view of the psychologist's participation in the school alongside teachers, administrators, students, and families as a mediator of conflicts. Interviewee D3 mentions that it "would be extremely important to help address problems with students, which in most cases stem from family

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21313627

issues," emphasizing how the school psychologist can serve as a valuable resource in dealing with family-related matters that affect students' performance and well-being, without merely blaming families or exempting the school from its educational responsibility.

Nevertheless, research conducted by the Federal Council of Psychology indicates that challenges remain concerning the understanding of Psychology's role in schools. Moreira and Oliveira (2023) point out that, although psychological practice encompasses different approaches, they all converge toward strengthening the teaching-learning process.

4 Conclusion

The research on the perceptions of management teams from municipal schools in Passo Fundo revealed a broad and predominantly positive understanding of the roles of School Psychology. Administrators recognize its importance not only in addressing students' emotional issues but also in enhancing the overall quality of the school environment.

The role of the psychologist is perceived as essential in conflict mediation, in providing guidance to students, teachers, and families, as well as in conducting assessments and interventions. These professionals are considered fundamental to promoting a healthy school environment in which students can develop holistically, both academically and emotionally.

However, the data reveal the coexistence of two conceptions of practice: a broader, institutional, and collective perspective aligned with contemporary guidelines in School Psychology, and a conception still marked by traditional practices centered on individual assessment, diagnosis, and therapeutic referral. This tension indicates that, although there is recognition of the importance of psychology in schools, understandings that tend to individualize school difficulties still persist.

The findings also point to important challenges, such as the need for greater integration between psychology and the school community, clearer definitions of professional roles and responsibilities, and the provision of institutional resources that enable continuous practice articulated with public educational policies. It is emphasized that psychology cannot be assigned exclusive responsibility for solving all problems faced by schools. Its work must

be linked to the Political-Pedagogical Project and grounded in a collective and interdisciplinary perspective.

This study contributes by highlighting how management teams understand the roles of School Psychology in a municipality where school psychologists have not yet been incorporated into the public basic education system. Additional contributions of this study include: assisting in the identification of social representations that guide institutional expectations regarding professional practice; mapping the potentialities and tensions between traditional conceptions and critical approaches in School Psychology; providing support for the implementation of Law No. 13,935/2019 at the municipal level; and strengthening the debate on the need for a School Psychology committed to the institutional, social, and political dimensions of education.

Despite its contributions, the study presents limitations that must be considered. The research included only the perspective of management teams, excluding narratives from classroom teachers, students, families, or psychologists. The geographical scope is limited to the municipality of Passo Fundo, which restricts the generalization of the findings to other contexts. Furthermore, data collection was conducted through a questionnaire with open-ended questions, which, although appropriate for the exploratory objective, does not allow for the same interpretative depth as in-person interviews or focus groups.It is also noteworthy that the absence of school psychologists in the municipal network means that perceptions are based on expectations and representations rather than on concrete professional experiences.

In light of the findings, it is important to expand future investigations to include different actors within the school community and to analyze concrete experiences of implementing psychology in public basic education. It is also suggested that future studies compare management teams' perceptions with the narratives from psychologists who work or conduct research in the field of School and Educational Psychology, thereby strengthening the dialogue among practice, professional training, and public policy.

It is concluded that the incorporation of School Psychology into public basic education constitutes not only a technical demand but also an ethical, political, and institutional

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21313627

commitment to promoting human development in both its individual and collective dimensions.

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