TURBULENCE-PROOF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT: DIRECTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN THE PORTUGUESE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

A GESTÃO ESCOLAR À PROVA DE TURBULÊNCIAS: RUMOS E DESAFIOS NO CONTEXTO EDUCATIVO PORTUGUÊS

GESTIÓN ESCOLAR A PRUEBA DE TURBULENCIAS: ORIENTACIONES Y DESAFÍOS EN EL CONTEXTO EDUCATIVO PORTUGUÉS

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ABSTRACT: The objective that guides this text is to analyze the relationship between school and democracy, focusing on school organization. The presence of the Young Protagonists Project was problematized, as a demand for the Full Time Education Program of Pernambuco amid the expansion of reference schools in secondary education. The micropolitical approach supported the qualitative analysis of real schools through a case study with a view to building new citizenships, structurally inclusive, of collective subjects around values, with a view to reducing marginalities. Among the results, the dichotomy between the determinations of the macro policy emanated by the educational system and the instituting potential of the schools is pointed out, guided by the figure of the manager. It is concluded that the school distances the student more and more from learning an authentic democracy, during a narrative forged to respond to legal-formal determinations to promote student protagonism.


RESUMO: O objetivo que norteia este texto é o de analisar a relação entre escola e democracia, com foco na organização escolar. Problematizou-se a presença do Projeto de Jovens Protagonistas, como demanda do Programa de Educação de Tempo Integral de Pernambuco, em meio à ampliação das Escolas de Referência em Ensino Médio. A abordagem micropolítica apoiou a análise qualitativa de escolas, por meio de um estudo de casos com vistas à construção de exercício da cidadania, estruturalmente inclusiva, de estudantes, em torno de valores democráticos, na perspectiva da redução das marginalidades. Entre os resultados, aponta-se para a dicotomia entre as determinações da macropolítica emanadas pelo sistema educacional, e o potencial instituinte das escolas, orientadas pela figura do gestor. Conclui-se que a escola afasta cada vez mais o estudante do aprendizado do exercício democrático, em meio a uma narrativa oficial, forjada para responder às determinações jurídico-formais de promoção do protagonismo juvenil.


RESUMEN: Las organizaciones escolares han visto su actividad fuertemente sacudida por la reciente crisis pandémica. Marcada por una estructura tradicionalmente centralizada y burocrática, la gestión escolar en Portugal se enfrentó a dilemas sin precedentes, que requerían soluciones rápidas y una capacidad permanente de reinvención organizativa, profesional, pedagógica y didáctica. Ante este escenario, ¿cómo reaccionó la organización escolar ante el confinamiento repentino? ¿Qué rupturas surgieron y qué continuidades perduraron más allá de la crisis de la pandemia? Este artículo analiza los efectos de estas turbulencias a nivel de la organización escolar, utilizando los resultados de algunas investigaciones empíricas realizadas en Portugal durante el período de la pandemia. El enfoque reflexiona sobre los desafíos que se le plantean a la gestión escolar en tiempos marcados por la incertidumbre, la imprevisibilidad y el riesgo, concluyendo con la idea de que el choque a la estructura escolar provocado por la pandemia abrió nuevas brechas en el sistema que podrían ser aprovechadas creativamente por la gestión escolar en favor de la democratización.

Introduction

The title of this article refers to two central questions: is education different in post-pandemic times? Can school leadership, *per se*, enhance innovation and change? Both questions suggest a one-dimensional representation of reality, which must be problematized. The times of the pandemic were particularly conducive to readings trapped in the immediate conjuncture, which tended to distort the view and hyperbolize the effects. This trend occurred in all areas of knowledge, with more or less pronounced emphasis and with a common denominator: most of the publications produced in the middle of the pandemic period focused on the immediate effects of widespread confinement and, in the case of education, the closure of schools and their displacement to "home schooling". Diagnoses were made, problems were identified (pedagogical, organizational, social) and educational changes were projected, almost always seen as inevitable. However, sometime after the pandemic crisis, it is interesting to *slow down the analysis*, contextualizing the processes in the long term and insisting on intersectional approaches (Pleyers, 2020), in order to investigate whether the changes caused by the crisis in the most diverse domains have effectively altered "the structural configuration of hegemonic forms of domination" (Afonso, 2020, p. 7). In essence, to seek in scientific knowledge itself the lenses to understand the complex mutations of the educational reality.

In this context, the confrontation between the scientific record (what science tells us) and the contextual record (what the educational reality tells us), as a reflective exercise, can point to some interesting clues. From a scientific point of view, there is now a consensus that the processes of social and educational change are the result of various factors, and are multidimensional in nature. On the other hand, in the contextual plane, the empire of the legal rationality in force in centralized educational systems imposes innovations and changes by decree, although the concrete organizational dynamics show us different ways of appropriating normative guidelines (Torres; Sá; Lima, 2020). Returning to the scientific record, several studies show that management and leadership processes are strongly conditioned by structural and cultural dimensions (Lindle, 2014; Normand, *et al*., 2021; Torres, 2022); in turn, at the contextual level, the belief in the transformative powers of *one best leadership* expands, regardless of the cultural singularities of school contexts. Moreover, this managerialist or leadership ideology (Lima, 2018; Lima, Sá, Silva, 2017; O’reilly, Reed, 2010), largely resulting from the expansion of New Public Management, is quite explicit in the various legal regulations that regulate the functioning of the education system. For example, a recent article shows precisely that, in Brazil, the profile of the school principal is "anchored in premises enunciated
by the New Public Management, predominantly managerial, meritocratic and standardizing" (Morgan, 2023, p. 1). Deeply articulated with this trend, there is the naturalization of the concepts of management and leadership, mobilized as synonyms, contrary to the conceptual differentiation underlined by scientific studies (Bush, 2019; Bush et al., 1999).

Given this scenario, in which the contextual reality seems to contradict and challenge some scientific evidence, it is important to reflect sociologically on the limits and potential of leadership in the school context. More complex than it seems, this challenge requires a contextualized analysis of management and leadership processes in their multiple connections with political, social, organizational, professional, and pedagogical factors. This multidimensional look becomes even more relevant after a pandemic crisis that shook the way school organizations work. How did the school organization react to the sudden confinement? What ruptures emerged, and what continuities lasted beyond the pandemic crisis? This article seeks to reflect on the effects of these turbulences and the challenges posed to school management in times marked by uncertainty and unpredictability. To this end, the results of some empirical research carried out in Portugal during the pandemic period are mobilized.

**What we know and what we have: Limits and potential of school leadership**

In recent decades, school leadership has become one of the most studied topics in the field of educational sciences. Theoretically inscribed in different paradigms and theories, this issue has achieved unprecedented research popularity, having also invaded the political agenda and the professional sphere of teachers (Anderson; Chang, 2019). However, the vast body of historically accumulated scientific knowledge now coexists with the tendency to overvalue managerialist approaches, which favor synchronic and unidirectional analyses between variables. Strongly influenced by New Public Management currents, these approaches seek to identify the traits of successful leaders in contexts marked by the ethics of performativity (Kulz, 2017; Shipps, 2012), leaving in the shadows the structural and cultural factors that condition leadership processes. However, numerous studies show that the characteristics of education systems and the singularities of school organizations significantly influence leadership processes (Barzanò, 2009; Normand et al., 2021; Torres, 2022). This means that the pandemic crisis, as an external factor, had multiform effects depending on the political, cultural and organizational contexts, as evidenced in research carried out around the world (e.g. Delès et al., 2021).
In fact, the Portuguese education system has characteristics that hinder and counteract the implementation of pedagogical and transformational leadership, internationally recognized as inducing the development of democratic schools (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Leithwood, 1992). For example, the prevalence of a centralized administration model, the existence of large school clusters conducive to the creation of differentiating and fragmenting cultures (Martin, 1992; Torres, 2004), the weakening of collective participation and the intensification of individualism, are structural dimensions of the Portuguese school system that, in the long term, have sedimented leadership patterns of an instrumental and performative type (Torres, 2023). In the opposite direction, pedagogical and transformational leadership requires conditions for the development of democratic autonomy and is associated with small organizations, more conducive to the construction of integrative cultures, the active participation of school actors, cooperation and teamwork (Sergiovanni, 2011). In this line of thought, educational architecture is a key factor in the development of certain management and leadership styles, which tend to endure over time and guide the strategic directions of school organizations. Even in times of pandemic, these structural and cultural factors remain active, even if naturalized in many surveys. Thus, it is important to analyze some marks left by the pandemic experience, having as a guiding thread the following questions: To what extent did the changes caused by the pandemic have the strength to alter the structural configuration of the hegemonic school form, or as Nóvoa (2019) referred, the historical project of the school (organizational, pedagogical and didactic matrix)? To what extent was the pandemic strong enough to change the installed routines, break the structures, change inertias and relationships with time and school space?

Methodological considerations

Although this approach favors a reflective register, it uses, from a methodological point of view, the analysis of the results of two questionnaire surveys administered during the pandemic to Portuguese families and teachers. These two questionnaires are part of an international project entitled "School at Home in times of pandemic", coordinated by French colleagues Filippo Pirone and Romain Delès from the University of Bordeaux³. Benefiting

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² Since the 1990s, the rationalization of the school network has established school clusters as the dominant organizational configuration in Portugal - 88% of the public network consists of vertical school clusters, which aggregate establishments of different levels and cycles of schooling, directed and controlled by the head school, under a unipersonal and omnipresent leadership (Lima; Torres, 2020).
³ Both questionnaire surveys were designed by the Portuguese team (Bruno Dionísio, Leonor Lima Torres and Mariana Gaio Alves), with reference to the questionnaire model administered in France. The results concerning
from this international dialog, the study in Portugal made some adaptations, preserving the model followed by colleagues from other countries, in order to ensure the international comparability of the results.

The survey "Home schooling: the parents' point of view" was administered digitally via Google forms between the end of May and the end of July 2020. Respondents answered on the basis of at least two and a half months' experience of lockdown and 'home schooling'. The questionnaire was addressed to parents with children in primary and secondary education (between 1st and 12th grade), through the mediation of the school principals, and 14,165 parents and/or guardians responded to the questionnaire.

The survey "School at home: the teachers' point of view" was also administered online, between July and September 2020, to Portuguese teachers teaching in primary and secondary education (high school). These teachers responded at the end of the school year in which the first general lockdown took place, when they had already been working remotely with students since mid-March. The request for participation in the study was addressed to all Portuguese state and private school boards, taking advantage of the connections that had been established to disseminate the questionnaire to the students' families approximately one month before. The team obtained a final sample of 3,983 responses.

The high number of responses achieved in the two questionnaires favours an expressive picture, although caution should be exercised in generalizing the results, since some variables show a distribution that denotes a certain distortion of representativeness in relation to the profile of the universe. Access to the online questionnaire, which resulted from the unequal dissemination of the device to the educational communities by the school management, together with a possible greater propensity of middle-class parents to self-mobilize to respond, will be taken into account when reading and interpreting the data.

In terms of data processing, various statistical procedures were carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics (28.0) software, although for this text only simple statistics (frequencies and percentages) and the crossing between variables were used. We chose to focus the analysis on the indicators that best expressed the emerging educational reconfigurations in this unprecedented historical period, paying particular attention to school invariants and

the questionnaire administered to parents and guardians were published in the dossier L'Ecole durant la pandémie: quels effets dans les différents systèmes éducatifs ?, under the coordination of Romain Délias, Inés Dussel, Elisabeth Hulqvist and Filippo Pirone, in the journal Éducation Comparée, 26, volume 2, 2022.
discontinuities. In addition to statistical trends, some written testimonies left by respondents to an optional open question at the end of the questionnaire were also mobilized.

The structure shakes but does not fall

In a previous publication (Torres, 2004), the motto *A estrutura abala, mas não cai* was used to illustrate the effects of the democratic revolution of April 25, 1974 on the (slow) change of the governance structure of a Portuguese secondary school. Half a century after this revolution, the same metaphor expresses well the effects of the pandemic crisis that shook the world. In the case of the Portuguese reality, the school structure was shaken in a way never imagined before, but it did not collapse; on the contrary, more or less deep cracks opened up, which left their mark on the system, schools, and learning and work processes. The pillars that support the school form remained - administration model, school governance structure, pedagogical organization, and participation practices - but the gaps that opened up allowed us to foresee both opportunities for change and ways of rigidifying the school structure.

The following section aims to highlight three fissures that involve this dual aspect - a potential that both transforms and reproduces school culture. In order to illustrate some trends, results from questionnaire surveys administered to teachers and parents/guardians of pupils in primary and secondary education are mobilized.

Intensification of uncertainties and unpredictability: *Governance by the balls*

One of the aspects that most significantly affected the functioning of school organizations was the emergency situation, which required a constant reprogramming of educational policies and practices adjusted to the environment of instability and insecurity. The sudden closure of schools and the relocation of teaching to the home context required a rapid reaction from governance structures and the various actors involved in school education. On the one hand, the State's targeted intervention in the strengthening of public policies was accentuated, namely the implementation of the telescope and the production of general guidelines that ensured the functioning of the system and the maintenance of social cohesion in times of crisis; on the other hand, there was a remarkable social and organizational reinvigoration translated into numerous initiatives developed by municipalities, civil society, school boards, families and teachers. The importance of the school-community relationship and
public-private collaboration in some territories was remarkable, highlighting the importance of a "polycentric vision of public policies" (Carvalho, 2015, p. 1026). For example, the provision of IT resources to schools and families in need by private entities has multiplied in several regions of the country, accompanied by other broader movements of social solidarity.

At the level of school management, the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed the need to desacralize long-unquestioned organizational dimensions - for example, the management of school spaces-time (hyperspaces), by changing the image of school-resort or school sanctuary (Fernández Enguita, 2018) to a more open school, which extends beyond the walls of the establishment. During this period, educational experiences were developed within the framework of the school-network idea, in which the school governance structure (meso level) was assumed as the nerve center of a demanding and always unfinished reorganization process.

The idea that all social sectors would have to join forces and be aligned to fight a planetary crisis brought out a sense of cooperation, mutual aid, and solidarity, putting school education at the center of national priorities. The fact that most families are confined at home has made the management of family and professional life more complex, requiring teachers and school managers to pay particular attention to the conditions of emergency remote education and homeschooling. The results of the parent questionnaire survey showed that at least one parent was in total lockdown (63.3%) during the first period of the pandemic crisis.

**Graph 1 – Total confinement or cessation of any face-to-face professional activity**

![Graph showing total confinement or cessation of any face-to-face professional activity](image)

Source: Questionnaire survey *Home schooling: the parents’ point of view*, administered to parents between May and July 2020 (n=14,165).

The sudden shift from school-based education to the home environment required the swift implementation of measures to ensure access to remote learning for numerous families. According to the survey conducted, 53% of teachers confirmed that school principals provided computers to all or almost all families in need, while 31.5% indicated that these devices were
made available only to some families (see Table 1). Only 10.5% of teachers stated that, although necessary, no computer equipment was provided.

**Table 1 – Provision of computers to families during lockdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, it was not necessary</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, although it was necessary</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but only to some families</td>
<td>1255</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, to all or almost all families who had this need</td>
<td>2110</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/no answer</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3983</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaire survey *Home schooling: the teachers’ point of view*, administered to teachers between July and September 2020 (n= 3 983).

The teachers surveyed also highlighted the importance of inter-help networks to deal with the technological difficulties imposed by emergency remote teaching, as well as the intensification of relations with families and students as a way to mitigate learning problems, especially for the most deprived students. The data presented in Graphs 2 and 3 show that, during the lockdown, teachers invested more than usual in relationships with students and families (60.3%) and participated more than usual in concertation moments or meetings with other teachers, school clusters management or the educational community in general (71.7%).

**Graph 2 - Investment, during confinement, in relationships (personal, affective) with pupils and families**

- More than usual
- No more or less than usual
- Less than usual

**Graph 3 - Participation, during lockdown, in concertation or meetings**

- Yes, more than usual
- Yes, but less than usual
- Yes, same as usual
- No

Source: Questionnaire survey *Home schooling: the teachers’ point of view*, administered to teachers between July and September 2020 (n= 3 983).
The unpredictability and instability caused by the pandemic crisis tested the capacity of school management to make quick and effective decisions to deal with school closures and the transition to emergency remote education, and subsequently with the reopening of schools, the implementation of safety measures, and the adaptation of curricula. It was an unstable period that changed school organizational logic, professional teaching practices, and learning processes.

Intensifying inequalities and enhancing school space: a more inclusive governance?

The intensification of inequalities has been pointed out by numerous studies produced during and after the pandemic crisis as one of the most visible effects of successive lockdowns. In the wake of Harvey (2020), the impacts of the pandemic are profoundly asymmetrical, accentuating inequalities and deepening discrimination between gender, class and ethnic groups. In fact, the mechanisms for reproducing inequalities have not only been maintained but also amplified by the pandemic, which has placed school education, once again, at the center of this problematic situation.

Emergency remote education has unveiled the different faces of inequality in the face of digital resources. More than the lack of digital resources by some pupils, the absence of the necessary skills to use them revealed how cognitive and cultural inequality translated into digital inequality. The results of the questionnaire survey administered to teachers are quite revealing: 82% of respondents stated that inequalities worsened during the pandemic period (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4** – Effects of lockdown on inequalities

Source: Questionnaire survey *Home schooling: the teachers’ point of view*, administered to teachers between July and September 2020 (n= 3 983).
In the same vein, the majority of teachers (50.3%) stressed that during the lockdown, their school/school cluster was more mobilized than usual on issues of inequality and inclusion. However, this mobilization differs according to the school organization profile, being higher in the most socially vulnerable school clusters, located in educational territories of priority intervention (TEIP clusters\(^4\), equivalent to the French ZEP), and less pronounced in private schools (cf. table 2). In other words, the focus on inequality and inclusion stems, to a large extent, from the characteristics of the public attending the educational establishments, with two contrasting scenarios being visible: on the one hand, the TEIP clusters, with socially fragile student audiences, and on the other hand the private schools, with a more socially elitist profile. In addition, a more focused analysis of cross-variables showed that teachers holding management and middle management positions were the ones who highlighted the mobilization of their schools in relation to educational inclusion.

**Table 2 - Mobilization of the school/school cluster during lockdown in relation to issues of educational inequality and inclusion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School cluster</th>
<th>More than usual</th>
<th>No more and no less than usual</th>
<th>Less than usual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School cluster</td>
<td>49,5</td>
<td>43,4</td>
<td>7,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-grouped school</td>
<td>52,6</td>
<td>39,8</td>
<td>7,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEIP cluster</td>
<td>57,6</td>
<td>39,4</td>
<td>3,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>35,2</td>
<td>59,2</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaire survey *Home schooling: the teachers’ point of view*, administered to teachers between July and September 2020 (n= 3,983).

Even if the priority of school organizations has focused on educational inclusion, *home schooling has* multiplied other types of inequalities arising from family socialization processes. The overwhelming majority of parents (80%) assume regular monitoring of their children's school activities, and it should be noted that these routines in the domestic space hide different educational strategies, depending on the cultural and economic capital of the parents. As pointed out in a recently published study (Torres; Dionísio; Alves, 2022), the progressive pedagogization of family and social life has accentuated, during the pandemic, differentiated

\(^4\) The TEIP program -Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária - is an initiative of the Portuguese government that currently covers 146 schools in economically and socially disadvantaged territories, marked by poverty and social exclusion, where violence, indiscipline, dropout and school failure are most evident. The TEIP programme has existed since 1996, with the number of participating schools being progressively expanded, and materializes in the provision of additional resources to the included schools to develop specific action and intervention programs.
parental relationships with school learning, putting students from the middle class at a competitive advantage.

If it seems consensual that inequalities have increased during the pandemic, it remains to be seen whether they will tend to normalize in the future in the daily management of schools. To what extent will the marks left by the pandemic be reversed in the redirection of educational mandates, placing the democratizing dimensions of education at the center of priorities?

The results of the survey show, on the other hand, that school closures and emergency remote teaching have contributed significantly to the valorization of the school space as an irreplaceable context for plural social experiences and experiences. Most teachers considered the emergency remote teaching experience a useful emergency solution, but only in the context of the health crisis (74.7%), and the teacher survey also found that teaching work became less interesting, less rich and less stimulating than usual (55%).

**Table 3 – Home schooling experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is a rich experience and the innovation it has brought should be preserved.</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an emergency solution, useful in the context of the health crisis, but should not be prolonged over time.</td>
<td>2972</td>
<td>74.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an experience with mostly negative effects</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3977</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaire survey *Home schooling: the teachers' point of view*, administered to teachers between July and September 2020 (n= 3 983).

In the final part of the teacher questionnaire, respondents could optionally add anything they considered important or that had not been addressed in the previous questions. Surprisingly, a significant proportion of teachers chose to respond in this open space, rightly highlighting the effects of remote teaching on increasing inequalities and teacher burnout:

I consider, even in an emergency, that a long period (weeks) of distance learning is extremely damaging to learning, increasing inequalities exponentially and having a very negative impact on socialization.

I often thought about committing suicide, as the confinement and the amount of hours in front of a computer left me no time to rest, sleep and take care of my family.

Some inequalities were exacerbated due to different levels of mastery of new technologies by pupils and parents and due to difficulties with equipment and internet access.
This type of teaching was possible, but it exacerbated school inequalities and was only possible, in many cases, because teachers were exceptionally committed, dedicating all their time to work, often detracting from their family life. They were very stressful days and this work only happened, in my opinion, because it was known that it was temporary and that for our students it was worth making that effort, but I do not think that repeating it will be as successful. At great cost, I endured a few months working every day of the week for an average of 12 hours a day, but if I am to continue, I cannot do this to my health, to my family life... in short, something will have to be left undone, I could not continue to live like this.

On the other hand, numerous testimonies underline the importance of the relational and emotional dimension of learning, which has been totally lost with the exclusive use of new technologies:

Like all experiences, this education has positives and negatives. But overall it is negative in the sense that it increases inequalities between students and interpersonal relationships are so important in learning and these are very difficult in this education system. Not forgetting that on screen we do not have the same perception of emotions/feelings and these factors are very important to motivate and stimulate our brain.

As an elementary school teacher, I have seen more than ever the importance of social relationships. At this level of education, nothing beats face-to-face teaching. In face-to-face teaching we are able to achieve results with our students that are not possible with other forms of teaching, due to various factors, including social, school and family inequalities. The physical classroom is a space where social inequalities can be effectively blurred. Therefore, it is very important that we return to the real school and not the virtual one.

There is no doubt that the increase in inequalities (in its multiple facets) has put pressure on the school system to prioritize educational inclusion and to make clearer both its potential and its limits in the democratization process. The following statement by an elementary school teacher illustrates well the dilemmas and tensions underlying the democratizing function of school education, as it warns of the difficulties (and incapacities) of managing and overcoming social inequalities:

The inequalities were so obvious that action is already being taken to find an answer; however, there were pupils who received equipment and could not use it because they did not even know how to turn on a tablet nor did they have anyone nearby to help them (the parent or parents had no idea). This issue takes on as much or more significance when there were teachers who were on the phone for hours trying to solve these problems and could not. This is a reality that seems unbelievable at the 6th grade level, but we have an
The long permanence of the "school" in the domestic space has not only left its mark but has also confirmed the excess and "overflow" of educational mandates attributed to the school, expressively highlighted by António Nóvoa at the beginning of this century: "The school is crushed, suffocated, by an excess of missions" (Nóvoa, 2007, p. 26-27). But to what extent will the pandemic experience alone induce the retraction or extension of educational mandates? Or as Fernández Enguita (2020, online) asked "¿Será posible que un virus agite más la escuela que decenios de movimientos de renovación, grupos de innovación y promesas de disrupción?". In fact, as the author anticipated, the changes caused by the crisis have mainly affected the disorganization of the system; the (re)construction that is now required is progressive and slow in time, requiring reflection and action.

Breakdown of face-to-face and invasion of digital: a more bureaucratic governance?

The sudden digitalization of education, by affecting all spheres (organizational, professional, pedagogical and relational), has dethroned the classroom as the main organizational space and, as a consequence, has changed the multi-secular technology - class teaching, capable of teaching everyone as if they were one. But did dematerialization of the classroom, starting with remote learning, innovate mass pedagogy? Was it a complement or an innovative alternative to the teaching model? The research data show two trends, reinforcement, and innovation: on the one hand, reinforcement of the reproductive dimension of teaching appeared as a predominant feature, and on the other hand, the pedagogical renewal induced by the mass use of technologies emerged as an opportunity for teachers' professional development.

When asked about the methods implemented during the lockdown, 75.4% of teachers assumed that they had occasionally modified the program to adjust it to distance learning (see Table 4), this trend being more significant in the 3rd cycle of basic education (approximately......
the final years of primary education) and secondary education (high school) and in the context of school clusters. The majority of parents also pointed out some limitations to emergency remote teaching, namely the replication of content and strategies present in face-to-face teaching. For example, they stressed that they would like teachers to offer more educational resources that are not strictly school-based.

**Table 4** – Implementation of specific methods to respond to *home schooling* during lockdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I have totally modified my program</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I have modified my syllabus occasionally to adjust it to distance learning.</td>
<td>2993</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I kept my program and transmitted the materials I already had designed for normal classes</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3968</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Questionnaire survey *Home schooling: the teachers' point of view*, administered to teachers between July and September 2020 (n= 3 983).

However, there is no doubt that the reproduction of the transmissive teaching model (with only occasional adjustments) required a strong pedagogical investment by teachers. The widening use of digital devices (22% used in pre-confinement; 93% now use in confinement) has opened up opportunities for the discovery of new teaching methods and their use in face-to-face teaching for most teachers, this percentage being higher among female teachers (83.5% versus 74.7% for male teachers) (see graph 5). Moreover, this trend was the result of a greater investment by female teachers, during the lockdown, in researching teaching and pedagogical resources, as shown in Graph 6.

**Graph 5** - Discovering new methods and acquiring new teaching habits

**Graph 6** - Search for didactic and pedagogical resources during confinement

Source: Questionnaire survey *Home schooling: the teachers' point of view*, administered to teachers between July and September 2020 (n= 3 983).
The progression in the use of digital competencies for pedagogical purposes assumed by 95% of teachers reflects an opportunity for professional development, although this may not be enough to change the classic pedagogical model nor the individualistic work logics prevailing in teaching work. Moreover, 72% of teachers reported that meetings increased during the lockdown period, which suggests an intensification of the bureaucratization of work, as some teachers testified in the open space available at the end of the questionnaire:

Constant stress in the continuous feedback to students, parents, pedagogical teams, management combined with research activity, preparation of strategies/activities/tasks, execution of weekly plans ... all digitized and placed/sent to various teams ... too much bureaucracy, even more than usual. The bureaucratic work, mainly in the Class Management and the Sub-coordination, which usually takes up too much of the time that should be dedicated to working with the students, was now even heavier and exacerbated. Much more and much better could have been done and/or achieved, had it not been for this aspect.

The data showed that, while there was a greater closeness to pupils and parents, there was a greater distance from the organization (management), especially at the level of school clusters (see graph 7). Paradoxically, teachers have never been so physically distant from pupils, but at the same time so close to their intimacy.

**Graph 7 – Personal and professional closeness in confinement**

![Graph](image)

Source: Questionnaire survey Home schooling: the teachers’ point of view, administered to teachers between July and September 2020 (n= 3983).

According to the data presented, the *home school* experience may have led to changes in professional practices and school management methods, without, however, breaking with the
historically established "school form" - effects that were felt more at the margins than at the heart of the school system. The intensification of bureaucratization, for example, as in other countries (particularly Mexico), seems to be associated with a greater personalization of teaching, organized on the basis of multiple tasks and "evidence" ("taskification" of school work), which have become a symbol of the relations between teachers and families (Dussel; Acevedo-Rodrigo, 2021).

Final considerations: school management in a context of risk and uncertainty

In the context of the Portuguese educational reality, the results of the research indicate that the pandemic crisis shook the school structure, opening more or less deep cracks and fissures, but did not have the strength to bring down the secular school model. Times marked by uncertainty, unpredictability, and risk have tested, as never before, the ability of school organizations to react and become more flexible. School structures, traditionally rigid and accommodating to predictability, have been forced to "learn" to live in unstable contexts marked by successive movements of deschooling and reschooling, and by various transitions of spaces, times and ways of working. This turbulent period has required a school management profile that is flexible and quick to respond.

Pressured by the urgency of decisions, school directors were faced with the need to regularly x-ray the system and their institution in search of quick, creative, and appropriate responses to each situation. But to what extent will the most creative responses generated by the pandemic, even those not aligned with the traditional organizational architecture (the deep grammar), henceforth be scaled up and sedimented in the school? Will the digital dexterity acquired by teachers be put at the service of democratization and educational inclusion? Or, seeking inspiration from Afonso's (2020, p. 9) reflections, will the pandemic's learning have the strength to develop the "multidimensional humanization project", overturning the "instrumental and unidimensional conception" that prevails in the educational universe?

The pandemic may not have generated significant disruptions in school culture, but it has opened the door to innovation and change. Therefore, with all the analytical cautions mentioned at the beginning of this reflection, it is possible to affirm that leaderships (in the plural) can effectively make a difference, especially if they promote the democratization of education, if they are at the service of the school / cluster mission, if articulated with school organizational cultures and close to the different professional identities that inhabit schools.
Two open scenarios can be equated: i) To what extent is the shaking of the structure generating new pillars in the school architecture? ii) To what extent is the erosion of democracy (more accentuated by the pandemic) being reversed through the revaluation of interpersonal relationships, cooperative work and the resignification of the school space? The first scenario involves expanding the relative margins of school autonomy and resisting the normalization of the "new normal", transforming instrumental management into effective pedagogical and democratic leadership. In essence, a leadership capable of restoring and strengthening the participation and collective feeling that the virus itself seems to have temporarily inhibited. The process of democratic erosion (Torres; Sá; Lima, 2020), enunciated in the second scenario, is perhaps the greatest educational challenge of contemporary society.

An erosion with deep roots that the pandemic has helped to strengthen will require a paradigm shift with regard to school organization, administration and management. This paradigmatic shift can begin precisely with the way in which each actor can actively contribute to the construction of new formats, assuming the place of agent and not only of passive executor. As Anderson and Chang (2019, p. 96) emphasize, "organizational leaders are not determined, but creative, agentic actors". The revaluation of the social and symbolic dimensions - a dimension expressively underlined in the pandemic - can effectively become the development of a more cooperative and supportive organizational disposition (Torres, 2017) or the activation of "radically innovative pedagogical and organizational practices that carry possibilities for transformation" (Afonso, 2020, p. 15), further reinforcing the school as a place for building the common. Or as the same author asks "Is reversing the economic creation of school clusters, redefining times and spaces, building smaller schools, with more space and fewer students, with more qualified and more socially prestigious professionals, unrealistic?" (p.15). Either scenario points to the need to re-humanize education in a community, solidarity and democratic logic, with school management being a fundamental dimension and a driving force in broadening and deepening this process. Simultaneously a means and an end.
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