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Challenges and limits of an education for all

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Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate the existence of two different types of school management culture. Data was collected during fieldwork over the academic years 2008 and 2009 in two public high schools in Rio de Janeiro where we observed administrative and pedagogical meetings, classrooms and the everyday life of the schools. From an analysis of the practices and conceptions of management staff, we describe the unconscious grammatical principles that govern the running of the two schools. These become particularly clear in the different selection procedures in the two schools, one of them conducting severe criteria for entrance and the other allowing all to enter but few to reach the end of the course. These two recruitment selection practices reveal distinct expectations and beliefs on students' ability (or inability) to learn.

Keywords: Secondary schooling, management cultures, school ethos, student selection processes and “pedagogia da repetência”.

Resumo

Neste artigo pretendemos demonstrar a existência de tipos distintos de culturas de gestão nos dois colégios pesquisados. Partimos dos dados coletados durante o trabalho de campo realizado ao longo dos anos letivos 2008 e 2009, quando observamos as reuniões administrativas e pedagógicas, as salas de aula e o cotidiano de dois colégios públicos estaduais, de ensino

médio, localizados no Rio de Janeiro. Para argumentar nossa hipótese, descreveremos os princípios gramaticais inconscientes dos dois colégios a partir das práticas e das concepções das direções, agentes centrais na produção da gestão e qualidade da organização escolar. Esses princípios de tornam mais claros nos distintos processos de seleção nas duas escolas, uma delas adotando severos critérios para admissão, a outra deixando todos entrarem, mas permitindo que poucos terminem o curso. Essas duas práticas de seleção revelam distintas expectativas e crenças na capacidade dos alunos em aprender.

Palavras-chave: Ensino médio, culturas de gestão, ethos escolar, práticas de seleção e pedagogia da repetência.

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Introduction

Following the introduction of universal primary education in Brazil at the end of the 1990s, the focus of national debates on education shifted to the final years of schooling: the period of *ensino médio*, or secondary education.¹ As well as exploring the objectives, curricula and student performance at this level (Castro & Tiezzi 2005; Moura Castro 2009), some studies have debated the high levels of repetition. Rio de Janeiro State, on which our study focuses, has one of the worst repetition and dropout rates in the country (Schwartzman 2011), maintaining what Costa Ribeiro in the 1990s called a ‘*pedagogia da repetência*’ (Costa Ribeiro 1991).

In his analysis of educational statistics in Brazil and the large number of students from all social classes who failed their exams and were forced to repeat the year, Sergio Costa Ribeiro asked: “How can we explain so much repeating of years in all social classes? May there be a pedagogia of repetition? Might this be the cultural foundation of our teaching praxis? Or is it a simple consequence of the inefficiency of the system?” (1991: 2). This is how he answers these questions:

It would appear that the practice of forcing students to repeat years is part of the pedagogical system as a whole, accepted by all the actors as *natural*. The

1 The education system in Brazil is formed by basic education – composed of infant, primary (*fundamental*) and secondary (*médio*: middle) education – youth and adult education, technical instruction and higher education. Infant education is not compulsory and is offered to children between three and five years old. Primary education is compulsory, comprising nine years of schooling for children between 6 and 14 years and is provided by municipalities and/or states. Secondary education, comprising three years of instruction, is not compulsory and is offered to young people between 15 and 17 years old, and is provided by the states. Youth and adult education is for young people over the age of 18 and is provided by the states too. Technical instruction, aimed at the work market, is for young people, non-compulsory and can be undertaken concomitantly with secondary education. Higher education is divided into teaching diplomas (*licenciatura*), bachelor degrees (*bacharelado*), postgraduate degrees and technological training. Source: Portal Brasil. www.brasil.gov.br/educacao/2014/05/saiba-como-e-a-divisao-do-sistema-de-educacao-brasileiro.

persistence and strength of this practice leads us to see it as a true pedagogical methodology that subsists in spite of all efforts to universalize basic education in Brazil. (1991: 3).

During the school years of 2008 and 2009, we conducted fieldwork in two public secondary education schools, located in the city of Rio de Janeiro: the Olavo Moura State School and the Amazonas State School². Once or twice per week we accompanied the day-to-day activities of principals³, teachers and students, as well as the school rituals and practices common to these microcosms. Our objective was to observe what was happening behind the walls of these schools, seeking to understand the phenomenon of repetition and the consequent exclusion of students from the classrooms.

We began fieldwork knowing that because the two schools were part of the Rio de Janeiro State educational network that they shared the same institutional regulations. We also knew that they had distinct selection entrance procedures for students, as well as different educational results. Armed with this information, we began participant observation, following the teachings of Malinowski (1984) by seeking the ‘flesh and blood’ of native life by observing administrative and pedagogical meetings, classrooms and the everyday routine of the schools. We also interviewed the two principals.⁴

In this article we describe the selection processes used by the two schools and analyse their management cultures, defined as “principles that organize school life and give meaning to their practices and beliefs” (Maggie & Pires do Prado 2014: 71). Our hypothesis is that the two schools possess distinct management cultures — one rational bureaucratic, the other charismatic — each with an ethos that organizes the institution, guides the education of students and interfere in their lives. Both these ideal types reinforce the selection processes of the students attending each institution.

2 All the names of colleges and social actors are fictitious.

3 The administration of schools is made up of a general principal and assistant principals, the number of which varying according to the number of students in each school.

4 The interview was divided into four parts: the first dedicated to collecting the personal data, academic training and professional experience of the director; the second to collecting general data on the school, the director's functions, school meetings and participation; a third part focused on the political-pedagogical project, student evaluation and assessment of the school in general; finally a fourth part aimed to sound out the opinions of the directors on a variety of issues concerning Brazilian society and the educational system.

We found that the practices and conceptions of the principals of the two schools were vitally important in the differences between them. The central role played by principals in educational analyses is a recent phenomenon. Research on school efficiency in the last decades of the twentieth century has invested in analyses of intra-school processes and the organizational qualities of institutions, seeking to identify the effect of the schools on the educational results of students, taking into account their social, economic and cultural characteristics. Pam Sammons's analysis of the international literature on the topic showed that leadership – usually exercised by the principal – was one of the key factors in school efficiency. Leadership refers to “the quality of individual leaders” and the roles that they perform, “their style of management, their relationship to the vision, values and goals of the school, and their approach to change” (Sammons et alli 1995: 13).

Analysing the Brazilian situation, Guiomar Namó de Mello delineates nine essential aspects to school efficiency. The first aspect is the leadership of principals: “the school's efficiency is associated with a technical coordination whose presence is strong and legitimized in the school environment and [...] the principal is the best placed to assume responsibility for this coordination” (Mello 1994: 338). Although there are factors related to the work performed by teachers and their expectations, Mello presents the principal as the person responsible for creating discussion spaces and setting the school's objectives. The principal is also the one who can work to ensure an adequate work environment and, above all, promote a belief in the students' capacity to learn.

The study carried out by Alves and Franco (2008) presents the recent findings of research into school efficiency in Brazil. One of the factors associated with school efficiency is its organization and management, highlighting the role of the principal. Barbosa (2009) also emphasizes the leading and indeed decisive role of the principal in her analyses of teaching institutions and their educational processes.

In light of this, we aim to demonstrate the existence of two distinct types of management culture in the schools under study, which provide an insight into the production and reproduction of educational inequalities and how these can be overcome.

An education for all? Learning about different selection processes

Olavo Moura State School

Olavo Moura State School, created in the 2000s, had a 2.5% repetition rate during the period of research. During our first conversation with the assistant principal Clara we discovered that the students from the school had performed very well in the external evaluation exams and the university entrance exams. The School received a positive evaluation from the New School Program.⁵ Created by the Rio de Janeiro State Education Department (*Secretaria de Estado de Educação do Rio de Janeiro: SEEDUC*), this program ranks schools each year according to management, efficiency and student proficiency in Portuguese Language and Mathematics, in the assessment known as SAERJ.⁶ In the SAERJ 2008 assessment, the School had 79% of students with adequate proficiency⁷ in Portuguese Language and 62.5% in Maths.

The assistant principal attributed the result to the fact that the School is 'special':

Firstly because the students already come here selected, by their age, by obtaining the best marks in their classes and by always having studied at a public school. Secondly the School has always worked towards quality in teaching from the start. But really I think that the difference is in the students' will. Our students know what they want, they know what they want

5 The New School Program was created by Decree n. 25.959 of 12 January 2000. According to Brooke, "it represents an attempt to improve the management of state schools and hold their directors and employees responsible for the students results" (2006: 388). For more details on the policy and its consequences, see Brooke 2006.

6 The Rio de Janeiro State Education Assessment System (*Sistema de Avaliação da Educação do Estado do Rio de Janeiro: SAERJ*) was created in 2008 and assesses the performance in Portuguese Language and Maths of students from Year 5 to Year 9 of primary education and Grade 3 of secondary education. The assessment includes indicators such as the number of students who took the test, the average proficiency attained by the school and the percentage of students at each level of the proficiency ranking (Low, Intermediate, Adequate and Advanced). Source: <http://www.avaliacaoexternasaerj.caedufjf.net/>. Consulted on 10/11/2014. SAERJ has two assessment programs: the School Performance Diagnostic Assessment Program, known as SAERJINHO, and the External Assessment Program, known as SAERJ. For a historical review of assessment systems in Brazil, see Bonamino & Sousa 2012.

7 Each school has a report card containing the percentage of students at each level of the proficiency ranking: low, intermediate, adequate and advanced. Low and intermediate students are below the learning level considered adequate for the grade/year. Adequate or advanced students are at a level matching or exceeding that expected for the grade/year.

to do with their lives. Here the students make demands on the teachers, they want classes, they want to learn, but the initial shock isn't easy. Some take time to adapt to the demanding pace of the classes, because our work is intensive, we really prepare the students.

The assistant principal's optimism in relation to her students is reflected in her reluctance to criticise them for their lack of 'grounding' or the 'destructured' families, that constitute a recurrent feature in Rio's public schools already described by sociologists and anthropologists (Maggie 2006; Earp 2006; Encarnação 2007; Costa 2012).

When asked what being 'special' meant, the assistant principal explained that the School was founded to meet a "very specific objective." As the outcome of an agreement established between the Rio de Janeiro State Education Department (SEEDUC) and a Federal Technical School (*Escola Técnica Federal*: ETF), its goal was to offer secondary education grades to students coming exclusively from the public system through "an entrance selection process."⁸

This agreement emerged after the reform of 1997 (Federal Decree no. 2.208 of 1997), which separated courses for secondary education and technical training and consequently led to a reduction in the number of compulsory places for secondary education offered by federally-run technical schools.⁹ The proposal was to offer students coming from the public school system the chance to obtain secondary education at a state School and technical training at a Federal Technical School with the aim of equipping them with professional qualifications for entry into the labour market.

The admission exams in Portuguese and Mathematics were not judged to be an egalitarian mechanism for deciding school places and were therefore replaced by what was deemed a fairer method: the selection of students who had obtained the best grades during their primary school education in public schools. In so doing, the aim was to give a chance of access to high quality education to the best students from public schools.

8 This is a unique case of a state college that selects its students based on their performance in municipal public primary schools. The other state schools have not selected their intake since 1998, as we shall see in the description of Amazonas State College. Technical colleges do not select in this way either since they use knowledge tests as an entrance filter.

9 Since the educational reform introduced by Law no. 9.394 of 1996, the offer of places for secondary education has become a priority for state schools.

The selection was made by analysing the pupil's school performance during primary education. All the municipal schools sent their pupils' report cards for evaluation by the principal of Olavo Moura School.

The way in which the selection process was described by the assistant principal seemed fairly rigorous, meeting the criteria stipulated in the instructions. These criteria obey the rational principles of bureaucratic organization insofar as they follow a formal and impersonal process.

The selection process began at the end of each school year when the general principal met with the principal of the Federal Technical School (ETF) to decide on the number of places available for the following year. Afterwards, the School, with the approval of the State Education Department, announced the opening of the selection process to representatives of all the Regional Education Coordination Offices (CREs) of the Municipal Education Department – by official letter or email – and the number of places on offer. The coordination teams of the CREs were subsequently invited to a meeting at the School where the regulations for the selection process were presented, along with the timetable for the various stages up to completion of admission. Next, each CRE informed the municipal schools of the selection process. The schools implemented an internal procedure to choose candidates, whose report cards were then sent directly to their respective CREs, which, in turn, forwarded them for evaluation by the staff members of Olavo Moura School.

Candidates were required to have studied at a public school from the sixth grade of primary education, be aged between 13 and 15, and have attained the grade MB (*Muito Bom*: Very Good) in Portuguese, Maths and Science. According to the assistant principal, the analysis began with the grades that the students obtained in the ninth year of primary schooling. If those chosen from this year did not fill all the places available, the selection continued with the analysis of the performance in previous years. In 2008, the list of students chosen was completed with the analysis of the report cards for the ninth and eighth years. After the selection was completed, the results were posted on the school notice boards, located close to the two entrances, and all the students who had entered – selected or not – were notified.

Another possibility for entering the School exists: some places were reserved for a set number of students approved in the entrance exams for

the Federal Technical School (ETF) who were unable to gain a secondary education place. The assistant principal explained that the agreement meant that the School had to receive up to 10% of the total student places forwarded by the ETF, a situation denominated 'admission residue' and one that had become more and more frequent. In 2008 twenty-eight students were forwarded by the competition, the equivalent of 14% of all those admitted that year, while in 2009 this figure had increased to forty-two students, corresponding to 17% of new places, possibly owing to the need for the Technical School to allocate more students in secondary education. The Olavo Moura School became well-known and acquired a reputation as a 'good school.' The assistant principal stated that they had received 650 requests for places in 2008, but they could only take in 182 students: "I know that a lot of good people were left out, but there are no two ways about it, we have to choose who is going to enter."

Inside the school, it was common to hear the principal, the assistant principal and teachers claiming that the students were motivated to continue working hard on their studies, since all of them had the opportunity to choose one of the technical courses provided by the ETF.¹⁰ At the end of the first year all of them could compete for a place on the technical courses based on the average grades obtained over the school year. From the second year onward, all of them studied at the school during one period of the day (the morning or afternoon) and at the technical school during the other.

The selection process described above can be seen as a compensatory policy since it sets out from the principle that the students are socially unequal and thus, in order to be fairer, the admissions policy at the school was designed to counterbalance these inequalities by restricting the choice of students to those coming from the public school system. Even so the hierarchical dimension of merit is maintained insofar as the students chosen are those with the best school performance.

The divergence between the attempt to make access more democratic and the priority given to selecting particular students on the basis of merit generates a clear tension. This tension can be interpreted at an analytic level as one of the emblematic aspects of the concepts of equality and

10 The students who obtained the best annual averages could compete for a place in the following technical courses: Administration, Civil Engineering – Buildings or Roads, Electronics, Electrical Engineering, Computer Science, Mechanics, Meteorology, Work Safety, Telecommunications and Tourism.

meritocracy, which, despite encouraging the development of a fair and meritocratic school system, are considered by François Dubet (2004) “a pure petition of principles”:

The desire for fair schooling is indisputable, but the definition of what would be a fair school is highly complex, or even ambiguous. The problem arises from the fact that each different conception of justice evoked immediately contradicts the others. Thus a fair school meritocracy does not guarantee a reduction in inequalities; [...] a school concerned with the singularity of individuals works against the school's requirement to transmit a common culture, which is also itself a form of justice. No perfect solution exists, therefore, only a combination of necessarily limited choices and responses (Dubet 2004: 540).

As Dubet (2004) argues, the meritocratic principle presumes that everyone submits to the same exams and the same school rules – despite many not knowing them – which generates huge inequalities, since performance differences are inevitable: “Ultimately, the meritocratic system creates enormous inequalities between good students and not so good students. However this is true of all competitions, even when the principles behind them are fair” (Dubet 2004: 543).

Analysed within a wider context, meritocracy introduces even more complex dilemmas since the selection and rewarding of the best students through the assessment of individual performance, intended to curb the reproduction of social and hereditary privileges, may become a mechanism generating new inequalities insofar as it gives too much prestige, in terms of honour and status, to successful individuals.

The unconscious grammatical principles governing the social actors of Olavo Moura School are marked by the search to reduce inequalities in school opportunities and to promote equity. For all those involved, the choice of the municipal school pupils who obtain the best grades in primary education does not represent a theoretical problem. On the contrary, selection based on school performance is considered fair by them and the tension existing in the relation between the egalitarian and meritocratic precepts is unquestioned. The school's approach is seen as a ‘great chance’ bestowed to ‘deserving’ students, as well as being considered a legitimate initiative, capable of bringing back the prestige

and quality of teaching “lost over recent years with the decline in state schools.”

In one of the planning meetings, the principal Ritinha emphasized just how fair she considers the initiative of founding Olavo Moura School to be:

If back then in 1999 there had been no educators who thought about the reality experienced by municipal schools and they had not implanted a School like ours, the outcome of a social project that benefitted those who really deserve it, would the vast majority of our students have been approved in an entrance exam? It’s an unknown quantity. Perhaps one or other would have succeeded, but most would have lacked this chance offered by the School.

In relation to the selection process based on the evaluation of school performance, we observed that the actors also consider it to be a mechanism naturalized by the school’s teaching philosophy. Once the selection has been made, the conviction widespread in the School was that all the students can learn thanks to the commitment of the principal, assistant principal and the teaching staff to “educate students with goals in life, true citizens.” The idea of some teachers of respecting the ‘mission’ of “educating qualified students” was that they should give priority to teaching the contents of the curriculum and undertaking rigorous assessments, exactly because the students were considered the “cream of the municipality.”

The Olavo Moura State School takes in students from various districts and favelas in the city, some close and others distant, which is facilitated by its localization close to a metro station in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro.

The school building can be glimpsed from the metro station. Immediately on leaving the station, a ramp can be seen that leads to a small square, usually frequented by students from the school, sitting on benches and concrete tables. During breaks between one period and the next, many students can be seen consuming food and drink sold by the local street traders, such as biscuits, savouries and sweets. This situation occurs regularly because the School, despite having a refectory that serves lunch, has no canteen.

The School is reached along a long alley that leads to a wide open space, used as a patio and parking space by teachers and employees. The space around the patio includes a multi-sport gym, an auditorium, a room – used by the student guild – with a dozen tables and chairs for the students, and

a garden. As well as these spaces there are another two buildings for the exclusive use of the Federal Technical School (ETF).

In front of the patio is the three-storey U-shaped building of the Olavo Moura School, painted light yellow above and covered in light and dark blue tiles below. The left-hand side of the building is also used by administrative sectors of the ETF.

Visible through the glass windows of the ground floor corridor are the kitchen and refectory, and a classroom where the Arts Education classes are held. Located on the first floor are the school office, classrooms, the computer room, the offices of the assistant principal and pedagogical coordinator, the staff room, and the male and female bathrooms. There is also a ramp connecting to the building used for the laboratory classes of the technical courses taken by the school's students. On the second floor are the library and the Afro-Brazilian, African and Indigenous Studies Centre, the other classrooms, the inspector's room, the video room, and the waiting room and office of the general principal.

The library has a collection of around 5000 catalogued books of all kinds, from classics of Brazilian literature to encyclopaedias, dictionaries and educational books on all subjects. There is a section with rare books for consultation only.

Olavo Moura School has around 650 students, distributed across the three years of secondary education and split between morning and afternoon sessions. In 2008 there were 7 class groups in Year 1, 5 in Year 2, and 7 in Year 3. In 2009, there were 8 class groups in Year 1, 6 in Year 2, and 5 in Year 3. According to the principal, the number of groups varies according to the number of technical course places made available by the ETF. In 2008, 214 students were enrolled in Year 1. The following year, this total rose to 247.

According to the data provided by the administration of the Olavo Moura State School, in 2008, of the 214 students who studied in Year 1, 2 failed to pass, 2 left and 4 were transferred. The following year, 208 students enrolled for Year 2, which as well as those approved in Year 1 included another 2 retaking the year. In analysing this data, we noted a management practice of allocating the class groups from Year 1 with a lower number of students, around 30, compared to the groups from Years 2 and 3, which have up to 38 students each. From Year 2 the students undertake a technical

course and the principal tends to group students from related technical areas in the same class group. The reduction of the number of classes from Year 1 to Year 2 is related to the number of students. Year repetition is not a central factor in the organization of the class groups in this School.

Most of the students were described by teachers and by the staff members as coming from low-income families, and a few from middle class families, but the “important thing is that they have a family structure.”

Amazonas State School

Amazonas State School was built in the 1960s and is situated on the boundary of two districts in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro. Between the 1960s and 1980s it was a model school for the state system. According to the assistant principal, the school was recognized because it had “an innovative educational approach” for the time, with good teachers, many of them also teaching in the nearby university, and accepted young residents from districts in the city’s South Zone. It was a period during which public schools conducted a selection process for student entrance and the Amazonas State School received students from the region, some belonging to the city’s elite.

The selection of students for the state schools, the well-known ‘concurso’, namely the admission exam, was banned in the state system in 1998. According to Mendonça (2006), the admission process began to be computerized, via internet or telephone, from 1999 with the aim of reducing the queues at the schools during the admission period. In some schools, queues would form before daybreak with the parents of students who wanted to ensure their children were enrolled. Mendonça writes that the queues were caused partly by the increase in demand for places in secondary education, and partly by the existence of ‘preferred schools,’ that is, “traditional schools or those assumed to possess a high standard of teaching” (2006: 93). In these schools the queues were longer.

The computerized system was improved over the years. In 2004 a pre-admission system was created in which students applied for a place at the school via a call centre. The criteria of age and proximity were used to assign preference when allocating the school places. In 2006 the Computerized Admission System (SISMATI) was created, which enabled the introduction of a pre-admission system via the website of the State

Education Department or via a free phone number set up for the purpose (Mendonça 2006).

The computerized system allowed students to choose from five options of schools and their preferred session (morning, afternoon or night). Student selection was not by order of inscription but according to the following criteria: students with special educational needs; children and adolescents below the age of 18; students already studying in the public system; proximity to home address; and preference for the youngest student in the case of a tie.

After the online admission period, the student received confirmation of his or her new school sent to his or her home. However completion of admission was only possible after submission of the necessary documents at the school. After the documentation period, those who had failed to obtain a place or missed the application deadline could go to one of the admission centres that had been created.

The transition from a system of admission in person – at the school with a contact between the staff members, parents and students – to a bureaucratic and impersonal computerized system was not without its tensions, especially among the families, accustomed to one type of admission process at the school. According to the assistant principal Maria, Amazonas State School was highly sought after: the “competition is huge.” It matches the kind of teaching institution defined by Mendonça (2006) as a ‘preferred school.’ When we began fieldwork at the start of 2008, we observed, even before the start of classes, a notice on the entrance door to the School: “We have no more places.” The admission period was already over, but some hopeful parents and students went to the School directly for a place, invariably in vain.

The principal, the assistant principals and teachers emphasized that the demand for the school was a consequence of the ‘fame’ constructed in the past and also the “School’s excellent location and infrastructure,” principally when compared to other public schools in the state system. Located in a region well supplied by public transport links to all areas of the city, the School has a main building and an external area with various installations.

Amazonas School has a main entrance that stays permanently closed and a vehicle entrance used as the ‘official’ entrance by students and staff. There is a gate for the cars and another for the students: both remain open during the day. On entering the School there is a sports court with stands, a volleyball

court, and at the rear a three-storey building. Running parallel to the courts is a corridor for pedestrians. Irrespective of the time of day, morning or afternoon, we almost always found students using the seating and courts. The sports court is used for physical education classes, during breaks and also in *tempo vago*, 'spare time.' The students use the term *tempo vago* to refer to those periods without classes due to the teacher's "absence". Teachers may be absent either because the school doesn't have a teacher for a particular discipline, or because he or she fails to appear. In Rio de Janeiro, a teacher may be absent for three days without having to present a justification. After this he or she must produce a justification usually a doctor's certificate.

The custom of teachers repeatedly being absent is widespread in Brazil. Such absences are justified by a variety of factors from medical consultations to a lack of motivation to work. When justified by the staff member, these days off usually do not harm his or her career. In the interim, students remain idle for some periods, on different days of the week, since in most cases the principal makes no plans to allocate a substitute teacher for the classes without lessons.

After crossing the courts, the inner patio of the building is reached, lined with wooden benches, also frequently occupied by the students, where a canteen is located and a refectory used by employees and teachers. On this floor there is also the kitchen, the offices of the principal and assistant principals, the coordination office, the administration offices, the library with a collection of 3000 books, and the computer lab with 30 computers connected to the internet. On the first floor there is a pedagogical coordination office, a staff room, the staff and student bathrooms, and twelve classrooms. The auditorium, where theatre plays produced by the students are performed, and another nine classrooms are located on the second floor. The School also has chemistry, physics and biology labs and a dance hall. The computer and science labs, the auditorium and the dance hall are kept locked and are only opened on those days when teachers are using them.

At the time of our research, the school's two thousand students were divided into three periods with 19 class groups each. There were 28 class groups in Year 1, 17 in Year 2 and 12 in Year 3 of secondary education, and a total of 130 teachers. The School divided the class groups into three periods, but concentrated the first year of secondary education in the afternoon. The staff members and teachers believed that this arrangement was best for the

School and the students, since the first year students had a distinct dynamic and needed to learn ‘the school rules’ quickly. The first year class groups were accompanied in the afternoons by two groups from the second year, both formed mostly by students repeating the year. According to the Portuguese teacher, having classes during the afternoon period served as ‘punishment’ to show the students that they were not studying hard enough.

At night, the School offered the three years of secondary education. Whenever reference was made to the evening classes, teachers and staff members claimed that “at night the school is entirely different,” suggesting an altogether lower standard. They pointed out not only the age of the students and the number of them repeating a year, but mainly the fact that the problematic students from the morning and afternoon periods were transferred to the evening period, very often at the request of the principal.

Amazonas School, even though in high demand by the community during the admission period was, at the time of our research, one of the state schools with the lowest marks in the New School Program assessment. In the 2008 SAERJ assessment, 25% of the students from Amazonas School had an adequate proficiency level for Year 3 of secondary education in Portuguese Language and just 8% in Mathematics. The School also had a high rate of repetition, which lowered its assessment by the New School Program. In the first year of secondary education 40% of students failed to pass to the next grade. In Year 2 the rate improved but 30% of students still failed to complete the grade. According to data from the School office at the time of the research, just 8.9% of the students who entered in 2006 were in Year 3 in 2008.

The situation in Amazonas State School is not unique. Schwartzman (2011) shows that the major bottleneck in the educational system in Brazil is not in primary education, as was believed until recently, but in secondary education. Using data from the 2009 School Census¹¹, he points out that “in secondary education, the repetition rate in Rio de Janeiro – 33.3% or one in three students – is one of the worst in Brazil, comparing to 16.3% for Paraná, 18.3% for São Paulo and 21.6% for Minas Gerais” (Schwartzman 2011:

11 The School Census collects statistical educational data at national level, coordinated by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP). It is the main survey instrument for information on school education, covering the different stages and modalities: regular schooling (infant, primary and secondary education), special education and education of young people and adults (EJA). The census collects data on teaching establishments, matriculation, staff functions, and school turnover and revenue from all the country’s public and private schools. Source: <http://portal.inep.gov.br/basica-censo>. Consulted on 10/11/2014.

231). Analysing the profile of the students, he shows that “among youths from 15 to 17 years old, who by age range should be in secondary education, no less than 40% are still in primary education, while 9% no longer study at all” (Schwartzman 2011: 229).

Along with repetition, one of the School’s problems was its low performance in the external learning evaluations by the public education system, such as the SAERJ assessment. As mentioned earlier, the students showed intermediate proficiency¹² in Portuguese Language and Maths, and still had a long way to go to reach an adequate level of proficiency for the grade/year that they were taking.

The principal, the assistant principals and teachers from Amazonas State School were able to explain the reasons for this situation. In 2008, in the pedagogical meeting held at the start of the school year, we witnessed a discussion between the teachers and staff members on the School’s educational indicators, which, according to the latter, were not positive. For the principals, the infrastructure was ‘good’ and the teaching staff was the ‘cream of the system.’ The negative assessment was explained by the “high repetition and dropout rates” of the students, which combined reached 40% in the three years of secondary education. The teachers joined the debate and, as well as criticizing the SAERJ assessment system created by the State for failing to reflect the “reality of the school and its students,” they criticized the students, emphasizing that “they are weak,” “they have no grounding,” mainly because of the municipal teaching: “the failures are there at the start in the municipal schools.”

Along with the students, the families and society as a whole were blamed for the School’s results: “The problem is with the parents, illiterate and alcoholic”; “The problem is cultural, society and the family. How can young people be motivated?” The assistant principal Maria remarked as follows about their students: “Some students arrive here unprepared. The problem isn’t with the teacher; it’s the system as a whole. Society is utilitarian and knowledge is worth nothing.” Whenever she had the chance, the assistant principal compared present-day students with those of the past: “Today we have absentee students who live in difficult communities,” “with family problems and a low level of education.” In sum, the school’s

¹² See note 7.

teachers and managers blamed the family, society and the primary education – offered by another school network – for the low proficiency of their students.

Distinct forms of selecting and excluding students

Based on the descriptions provide thus so far, it can be seen that two kinds of student selection exist: one implemented on entry and the other over the course of the three grade years of secondary education. The first type of selection is undertaken by Olavo Moura and the second by Amazonas. Let us examine how they operate in practice.

At Olavo Moura School, the observations made during the School Council (*Conselho de Classe*: COC) reinforce the high expectation of the staff members and teachers and their belief in the students' capacity to learn, reflected in the low repetition and dropout rates, which did not exceed 2% per grade.

Most of the judgments made by the teachers during the council that we observed in September/October of 2008 concerned the behaviour of the students, taking on an explicitly moral character, evident in the constant remarks about their immaturity and lack of discipline. But apart from emphasizing student lifestyle and behaviour, staff worry about maintaining a high standard, since the expectation was that the school's performance would not decline. This concern became clearer when the teachers debated among themselves the material to be taught. In the heat of the discussion, one of the teachers exclaimed:

When these kids came here they could already imagine that they wouldn't get an easy ride. In the first week of classes, it was already clear what the School would be like. I didn't do 'training school,' I don't want to waste my time teaching them how to behave in class. I want to prepare them to face life outside and know the curriculum required by the Technical School, isn't that why we're here after all?

The principal Ritinha declared: "It's good that you have all posed this question, because if the main stakeholders, namely our students, aren't particularly interested any more, then we need to review our work urgently." The principal asked the teachers to encourage the students' curiosity in

learning: “Listen everyone, when students are keen to learn, they advance. Nothing stops their growth. They have to understand that success is built on sacrifice and dedication.”

Jorge, the student representative, raised his hand and asked to speak. He said that he had talked to his class group and his colleagues had promised to make the July/August period the best of all: “We know that the marks aren’t that important, because what stays with us is our learning. We want to make this commitment to improve.” Apparently some teachers did not find Jorge credible. One of them joked: “He’s just like a politician, it’s all just promises.” The assistant principal Clara, opposing the teachers, encouraged the class group’s initiative: “That’s the spirit Jorge, that’s the idea. By showing application, concentration and motivation you’ll succeed.”

The description of this situation in the School Council demonstrates the school climate of encouraging students and an impression, internalized by the teachers, that the students could be pushed, since they were pre-selected and should be able to live up to expectations. The table showing the overall performance for each class group, presented by the assistant principal in a data show, showed how in the categories evaluated by the teachers – development, responsibility, relationship, participation and discipline – the groups were classified from ‘average’ to ‘very good’ with none obtaining an overall result below the expected minimum.¹³

At Amazonas State School the selection takes place over the three years of secondary education. Various situations enable us to assert this fact. According to the principal Giovana, 28% of students repeated Year 1 in 2008. Data from the School office provided by the principal, show that annually the classes from Year 1 declined in number: from 28 groups they fell to 17, and from 17 in Year 2 to 12 in Year 3. A reduction of approximately 40% of the classes from Years 1 to 2 and around 30% from Years 2 to 3. The principal reported that just 8% of the students from Year 3 had never repeated a year of secondary education.

This practice became even clearer in an observation made in the staff room by a physics teacher. He said: “In Year 3, at the end of the year, around

¹³ The state secondary schools hold four School Councils per year where the teachers evaluate the students and class groups in terms of behaviour, diligence and performance with the following classifications: very good, good, average or poor.

five students were failed per group only. In the second year, a half, and in the first more than half the students.”

The School Council meetings provided us with the opportunity to observe the ways students were selected or excluded. One of the frequent questions concerned the pupils who repeated years: what should be done with them? In Year 1 of secondary education they were distributed in each of the class groups along with the new students entering the School. This information was given by the principal in a School Council after the teachers complained about the excessive number of students repeating the year in one class group. The assistant principal Bia reported that they had put the same number in each of the class groups: 9 students each. After hearing the explanation, one teacher said: *“this class group won’t be together next year.”* The assistant principal added: *“half the group is going to fail the year!”*

In the second year of secondary education, on the other hand, we observed that there were just two class groups in the afternoon period, where “the majority of the students were failing the year” according to the Portuguese teacher. We lacked data on how the other groups from Year 2 had been assembled, but a clue was given by the assistant principal Bia during the School Council: the good class groups from Year 1 could be maintained in Year 2. She told the teachers: “Should some group from Year 1 be kept? We can do this for Year 2, keep a good group together.”

As well as being distributed among the various groups, those repeating a year for the second time might also be invited to transfer to another school. At one School Council the case of a female student was discussed. All the teachers present agreed that Marília hindered the teachers’ work. The assistant principal, who immediately recognized the student in question, explained the situation: “She is repeating for the second time.” And she told them her decision: “If she fails the year again, I’ll send her to Professor Ferreira School.” One teacher, who worked at the latter School, replied ironically: “Why do you always have to send the problems there?” Everyone laughed and the meeting continued.

Unwanted students, repeating years or not, who did not leave the School were transferred to the evening period, viewed negatively, as we have seen by the teachers and staff members alike. Such was the case of Breno, who was studying Year 1 again during the evening period. In the

middle of the year, after various warnings for bad behaviour and a clash with the Art Education teacher, Breno was transferred, at the principal's request, from the afternoon period – when most of the Year 1 class groups studied – to the evening.

What we can note through the observation and interviews with teachers and the school staff is the existence of a system for allocating students, principally after the first year at the School. When they enter the institution, the school has no way of selecting them since there are as yet an unknown quantity. By Year 2, however, the teachers and principal are able to separate the students into good and weak class groups – or in the words that we heard over the course of our research: “this class is good!”, “this group isn't so good,” “it's a complicated class.” Over the year four School Councils were held and we did not observe any class group being positively evaluated by the teachers. All were judged to have a ‘poor’ or ‘average’ performance.

Though different, the two kinds of selection processes described here are widely naturalized by both principals and their teams. While at Olavo Moura School there is selection on entry, which is reflected in the expectations and beliefs concerning the potential for the students to learn; at Amazonas School universal access did not prevent the social actors from finding other selection mechanisms, expressed in practices related to year failures and the allocation of students to different class groups. In the two cases studied, we noted the existence of unconscious grammatical principles that guide the actions of the management teams and that produce ideas concerning the everyday running of their institutions. Such principles and practices lead to the exclusion of some of the students, whose educational performance has failed to match the expectations and beliefs of the School's teachers and principals.

Management cultures: their rituals and practices

Maggie & Pires do Prado (2014) identified two ideal types of management culture through participant observation and ethnographic studies in 32 schools in Rio de Janeiro. According to the researchers, one of the key

elements in terms of defining students' careers are the beliefs and practices of the managers and their relationship to the school mission.

In the first ideal type, named bureaucratic-rational, the management believes that the school makes a difference. The managers seek to run their schools in compliance with outside demands, such as the external assessments and the laws issued by federal and state governments:

This ideal type of management culture produces a school ethos focused on the quality of teaching. The managers utilize all existing channels to liaise with the upper echelons of power – the coordination offices and SEEDUC – and know to emphasize that a good school is one that teaches the highest number of students possible. The principals identify year fail as an impediment to learning. The managers of this ideal type give value merit and fight for the students to do well in the external assessments (Maggie & Pires do Prado 2014: 72-73).

In the bureaucratic-rational ideal type, aside from the rational rules used to plan school activities, charismatic means are also used to obtain the proposed objectives. According to Maggie & Pires do Prado (2014), the studies conducted by their team showed that this type of manager also performs as a 'charismatic' leader in the Weberian sense of the term.

In the second ideal type, charismatic the managers believe that the school's quality is defined by the capacity of the students to learn. The school itself is not seen as responsible for the performance of its students. In this case, the expectations in relation to performance are not high.

They do not organize the school to respond to the demands of evaluations (...), they have an antagonistic relationship with the coordination offices and SEEDUC. The managers emphasize that their objectives are to create critical citizens and give the best students special attention in order to guide them to the university. Education is not for everyone and those who make little effort or fail to respect the teachers are, in general, side-lined (Maggie & Pires do Prado 2014: 74).

Charismatic managers tend to remain in their posts for many years at a time, legitimized by a tradition shared by the families, students, teachers and

employees alike. They may also employ bureaucratic means in their everyday activities, in part because they have to comply with the orders coming from higher level bodies, principally the Education Department, which demands compliance with public policies and set targets.

We can turn now to the paradigmatic cases that illustrate how these two types of management cultures are expressed in everyday school life and in the different forms of selecting students.

The principals

Bureaucratic-rational management culture

At Olavo Moura School there were two principals responsible for the administrative and pedagogical organization. Our first contact was with the assistant principal Clara, professor of geography, who had been part of the principal since 2002. The day-to-day life of the assistant was taxing, since, as she herself pointed out, her job was to deal directly with the students. As assistant principal, she resolved questions related to reserving the projection room or auditorium, disputed every day by the teachers – who preferred to give lessons in these places – and by the students – who often wanted to rehearse a theatrical show or work on a project that needed extra space. Clara left annotations in the notebooks of absentee students, wrote messages to the parents, organized alterations to the school calendar and announced them on the notice boards and distributed text books, and cleared up doubts about the dates of retake tests or events in which the School was participating.

When we met, Clara said that we could continue the research as long as the principal Ritinha consented: “Only she sees everything that happens in the school. Everything goes through Ritinha.” We took Clara’s advice and approached Ritinha at the first general meeting during the pedagogical planning week, held on 11th February 2008.

Ritinha, teacher of administration, has headed the School since its foundation. She was responsible for the administrative decisions that involved the School’s relations with the State Education Department and the partnered Federal Technical School and for all other internal decisions.

Unlike Clara, the principal's work days and times were not fixed. She might not appear some days but, when present, she would stay until after office hours. Ritinha spent most of the time in her office dealing with administrative and financial affairs such as accounting reports¹⁴ or busy producing the reports required by the State Education Office. Normally she met with Clara or with the teachers.

In the first two years Ritinha ran the school alone. In 2002, in its third year of operation, the school had students matriculated in all three grades – 203 in Year 1, 358 in Year 2 and 298 in Year 3 – which allowed her to allocate one teacher to the post of assistant principal. Ritinha chose the geography teacher Clara: “A dedicated teacher in whom I could trust.” By the time of our research, Ritinha had already assembled a team of employees who, she said, “put on the uniform and immersed themselves in the task of keeping the school running.”

In her principal's office there is a recent photo of Ritinha next to the Education Secretary and the state governor at the time. Posters with pictures of all the class groups in graduation robes line the walls, along with certificates won by students in various essay competitions on one wall and, on another, in pride of place, certificates for school management awards.

On some occasions, Ritinha would arrive early at the School. She would head to the staff room to persuade them to enter the classroom five minutes before the first period. In addition, she would talk each week with the teachers concerning the planning and progress of work in the classroom. According to Ritinha, these evaluation moments “need to be well prepared in order to ascertain what helped and what hindered the students' development.”

At Olavo Moura School the ‘mission’¹⁵ promoted by the school community was discussed over the year and put into practice in the “pedagogical project (PP) week.” In these pedagogical project meetings, the principal also encouraged teachers to develop research projects with the students on citizenship and the theme chosen for that year. In 2008, teachers and students centred their research on the theme “Encounter of

14 In 2008, one of the State Education Department's requirements vis-à-vis resource management was for an accounting report to be presented with details on college expenditure. This report had to be presented five times per semester.

15 Olavo Moura College's mission was set out in all its official documents and repeated various times by the directors in the pedagogical meetings: “Develop contextualized educational activities designed to promote the experience of ethical and collective values with an emphasis on preparing for work and intellectual independence.”

cultures – constructing a better world,” in homage to the bicentenary of the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in Rio de Janeiro.

In the concluding week of the pedagogical project, held in May/June, teaching activities were interrupted in order for everyone to take part in the cultural and scientific presentations held in the School yard. On each day of the event, Olavo Moura School would be packed with students and teachers taking in the dance and theatrical shows, arts exhibitions and tents with traditional food.

The Olavo Moura School staff believed that applying the ideals of citizenship is a precondition for ensuring the quality of their work, understood as its capacity to “educate citizens for life.” The relationship between ‘educating citizens’ and the pursuit of excellence in the academic training of students consists in the possibility of connecting these ideals. The complementary character of these elements becomes compatible insofar as the principal and teachers believe that both learning practices related to citizenship and curricular knowledge can be converted into training qualified students and, consequently, into real opportunities for the latter to enter the labour market or higher education.

A consensus existed at Olavo Moura School that the students should seek a high level of excellence in the internal and external assessments. As well as aiming for high marks, the students were encouraged from Year 1 onwards to take part in a wide variety of public competitions, such as the National Secondary Education Exam (ENEM)¹⁶, in order to obtain places on the most disputed technical courses or universities.

From the very first lessons the teachers tell students that they need to “invest heavily in studies.” In the Portuguese class taught by Rubens, references to essay competitions and the demands of the university entrance exams¹⁷ were constant:

16 The *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* was created in 1998 with the aim of evaluating the student’s performance at the end of basic education. From 2009 it also became used as a selection mechanism for entry to higher education, adopted by the majority of public and private Brazilian universities. The exam comprises 1 essay in Portuguese and 4 objective tests, each containing 45 multiple choice questions on the following areas of knowledge: Human Sciences and their Technologies, Natural Sciences and their technologies, Languages, Codes and their Technologies, Mathematics and their Technologies. Source: <http://portal.inep.gov.br/web/enem/sobre-o-enem>. Consulted on 14/10/2014.

17 Some universities also opt to conduct a selection process independent of the National Secondary Education Exam, involving exams to test the student’s knowledge based on the curricula set by primary and secondary schooling.

This school is an enemy of anyone who leaves studying to the eve of the exam, especially in the hard sciences, because in Portuguese we can still use our prior knowledge. But you need to realize that studying demands sacrifice, effort and commitment, Above all, what you learn here... you have to 'run after outside,' study at home. The biggest failure rate in the entrance exams and the ENEM is due to the student not knowing how to interpret the question. When you experience the pleasure of reading and understanding something profound, you will feel really satisfied.

While expressing high expectations for students' performance, Rubens also complained about the disciplinary rigour demanded by the principal. Like other interviewees, he believed that the everyday actions headed by the principal were too bureaucratic, concerned with meeting the goals set by higher bodies like the Education Department. The overall impression was that Ritinha centralized decision-making and showed a concern with the image the School's outside image.

Even the students had internalized the idea that both the principal and the teachers were committed to making the School function smoothly. Jorge, the student representative, stated: "Obviously there are weak points in any structure, but the principal here freely interact with the students. There is a lot of exchange and dialogue, and that encourages each person's commitment to grow." Assessing the principal's work, another student added: "Ritinha is always away from the School, she has to sort out a load of problems. There's that downside, but the fact that the School has achieved this level it because of her work." However much Ritinha's daily absence was criticized, there was a shared mood of praising the principal and teaching staff's work with the students.

Ritinha had received awards for her administration. Since 2003 she had written the school's application¹⁸ for the National Award for Outstanding School Management. The school won high positions among the finalists and won one of the four diplomas attesting the status on "National School of Reference in School Administration", conferred by the State Secretariat of Education.

¹⁸ The documents produced for this competition are designed to promote the self-assessment of public schools in order to encourage improvements to management processes and the quality of teaching. The highest ranking schools receive the diploma and a lump sum to be invested in educational projects.

Charismatic management culture

At the time of our research, Amazonas State School had a general principal and two assistant principals. The general principal Giovana joined the School's staff in 1970, still young and during the institution's golden period. Before becoming principal in 2001, she taught geography, was pedagogical coordinator and assistant to the principal who made the school 'famous.'

It was difficult to find her at the School because, as she made clear, she had "many outside activities: meetings in the [State Education] Department, in the Metropolitan [Education] Department, and in the regional administration." When she was at the School, she would mostly remain in her office lined with the diplomas received over her time as principal. We met her at the School during two important events: at the staff talk given at the start of the school year, and at the presentation of an award from the State Education Department for the quality of the work undertaken by the School in 2007.

In the interview with Giovana at the end of 2008 we saw how she knew and managed the administrative part of the School and could immediately cite the number of students, the number repeating a year and the pedagogical structure. She was keen to emphasize that she took part in all the students' activities inside and outside the school, including walks and sports competitions. The School held sports and cultural activities with students on Saturdays and the principal, along with a Portuguese teacher, was responsible for organizing these events. The principal did not take part in the School Council meetings. She relied on the assistant principals for this work, as well as the assistant to the principal, João. The two assistant principals were frequently seen at the School, each of them at a specific time of the day. One of them, Maria, aged over 60 and with 30 years' experience working at the School, often emphasized the difference between students past and present. Maria was responsible for making the 'rules of the game' clear to the students.

On the first day of class she entered the staff room and said: "I'm going to visit all the class groups, welcome the students and tell them the school rules: no baseball caps, no short t-shirts, those kind of things." That day we watched her enter one of the classes from Year 1. The students remained silent listening to the rules as they were read out by the assistant principal. After she left, they said: "That's the principal! Here it's different to the municipal [school]," indicating that the rules were distinct and stricter than those at the municipal primary school.

Another time, we watched her enter a biology class for a group from Year 1. The class had run into problems with one teacher and some students had been switched to the evening period. The assistant principal Maria came into the classroom, told the group about the transfer of the students and the reason behind it. The class remained silent. Before leaving, the assistant principal summoned two female students to talk in her office. While the students were rising from their tables, Maria asked the group: “Who is repeating the year?” Two students raised their hand. Maria then concluded: “That’s how things are here: those who don’t want [to study hard] don’t stay.” She then left the classroom with the two female students.

The other assistant principal, Bia. Aged 45, she was the youngest member of the principal team. Like Maria, she worked out of a small office on the ground floor where she received students and teachers. Both women were responsible for running the School Council.

Though present at the School, meeting teachers in her office and coordinating the council, we saw the two assistant principals from time to time in the staff room at times when the teachers were gathered there: between classes and during the school breaks. One day we observed Bia talking with various teachers and, in particular, a biology teacher about the plaque with the School’s mission.¹⁹

The principal’s work of organizing the school and pedagogical activities was assisted by a support team. The educational supervisor at Amazonas State School, Márcia, coordinated the meeting with student representatives and was responsible for talking with the “problematic and unruly students.” She provided information on the students to the teachers and principals members at the School Council.

Another two employees helped the principal. João, a former teacher, was responsible for working out the timetables for the classes and teachers, and also coordinated some councils. Meanwhile Telma, an administrative assistant, organized the hours of the class groups on a daily basis and registered and dealt with teacher absences. Everyday there would be

19 One month after the start of classes, posters were put up on the stairs and in the staff room with the school’s mission. “The school’s institutional mission is to promote the knowledge building and cultural development of its students, empowering them to overcome the difficulties that affect the human condition and work towards their social integration and embodiment of ethical values and citizenship.”

some lesson with an absent teacher or one on sick leave. If there was no teacher, Telma reorganized the group's timetable and the teachers available in order, if possible, to avoid class groups hanging around at the school without lessons. She also allowed students and teachers to leave school early wherever possible. Teachers could frequently be observed asking whether their lesson with a class that was due to be taught by an absent colleague could be brought forward. At the same time, whole groups could be seen waiting in the patio for the next lesson.

The staff room was a particularly good space for observing the teachers' activities. It was common to see them chatting before and after classes and during breaks. They would talk about the students, the class groups and student assessments, as well as about personal matters. When the bell rang for the beginning of lessons, the end of break or a new period, the teachers stayed chatting or marking tests and essays. After 15 minutes, we would see them starting to head towards the classrooms. Before the classes finished, teachers would already be drifting back to the staff room.

We observed that the principal had to negotiate with the teachers for them to comply with the School's activities and timetables. One afternoon, at the end of break, the bell rang and as usual the teachers continued to talk. The assistant principal Bia entered the staff room and asked the teachers: "Listen everyone, I'd like you to head off to your classrooms because the students are milling around in the corridor and today we're without the inspector."²⁰ Some teachers complied with the request. Others arrived in the classroom 20 minutes after the start of the lesson.

Another time, during the start of year staff meeting, the principal asked the teachers to assemble by subject area to organize the school year and programs, which generated some resistance among the teachers: many did not want the meeting to be held and others intended to leave it until the start of classes. The assistant principal Bia addressed each group resisting the meeting and solicited their support: "We know that later doesn't work. It's better to hold it this week."

20 Inspector here refers to someone responsible for supervising the students both inside the classroom and outside.

The office of the principal Giovana was lined with school management certificates and diplomas. In 2008 she received the award from the State Education Department for the quality of work undertaken in 2007, highlighting the school's cleanliness and infrastructure. That year the School was also among the five schools chosen in the 2007 National Award for Outstanding School Management. In 2009, it also received an honourable mention for the 2008 award. It may seem contradictory for an award to be given to a school like Amazonas with high repetition rates and low expectations for the learning potential of students. However, management awards in schools with low student proficiency are common.

The prizes were officially handed out at an event organized by the State Education Secretariat. Even so, the principal, Giovana, held a ceremony at the school to which she invited teachers, students and members of the State Secretariat. In 2008, the presentation of the award for quality of work was made in the auditorium in front of selected class groups with 'good students' and the teachers, as well as authorities from the state government. After the ceremony, a buffet was offered to the guests in the staff room.

Giovana explained to us that the prize was the result of her work as administrator. The ceremony was a way of marking the fact that her mission of putting the school back as a reference had been achieved. She stressed that although the prize was given by the Secretariat, her work was also recognized within the school. She told us that the teachers had decided to name one of the classrooms after her in recognition of her continuous and dedicated work. To begin with she turned down the offer, but later accepted, when she saw that it was a homage and that she was admired both within and without the school.

Expectations of the principals and teachers concerning the students

In the interviews conducted with the principals we asked about their expectations and those of their teachers for the performance of the students on a scale of 1 to 5 – 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. The two principals had distinct expectations.

In the case of Olavo Moura School, they were higher than those of Amazonas, as the principal's remarks suggest: "Our expectation is high,

we want the best for our students. But if we're going to assess their performance, I would give a 4." Beyond this explanation, reiterated constantly at Olavo Moura School, it can be noted that even when the students are not as good as expected or have failed to acquire the ideal scholarly qualities, the principals and teachers continue to share the belief in their potential to learn.

The principal of Amazonas assessed her expectations for the students as a 3 and explained: "It's 3 for Year 1 and 4 or 5 for Years 2 and 3." She added that poverty and social background do not impede pedagogical development: "It's not poverty. When the person wants, they have the opportunity."

Still on the same subject, we asked the principals whether they thought that the school enabled its students to change their lives. Principal Giovana's thought that it did, albeit for some students only: "They will change according to what we give them. We worked here at the school on being independent, adopting a correct attitude to life, posture and values, and these things are difficult, but whoever wants can succeed!"

As the literature has demonstrated – since the studies on the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson 1968) – expectations tend to function as a "self-fulfilling prophecy." The belief in students' capacity to learn at Olavo Moura School may be one of the factors leading to good performance. The 'Pygmalion effect' can also be applied to Amazonas School, where low expectations can contribute to poor performance. In this case, the "self-fulfilling prophecy" excludes the students.

The principals' expectations are reflected in their attitudes and responses to the students' results in external assessments and awards. At Olavo Moura State School, for example, we saw on the principal's table the results of the 2007 National Secondary Education Exam that had just been published in the press. On this occasion, Clara said that she had been tracking the School's performance in the assessments and was keen to know whether the students had attained a high position in the school ranking. When she saw the figures, Clara was happy because "the results of the students demonstrated once again that they weren't in the same bracket as the other state schools."

That same week some messages extolling the performance of the students in the ENEM were posted on the School notice boards and in the staff room: “Olavo Moura State School, best score in the 2007 ENEM for state schools”; “Educational community, congratulations on the result in the 2007 ENEM. It is working together that promotes our growth. Our goal in 2008 is to be among the top schools. Positive thought and action.”

At the second meeting with those responsible for the students, the principal Ritinha commented that the School has “emerged as one of the best of the school system” and that the School’s high standards had been achieved “thanks to the team’s solidarity and effort”:

All the other problems that the schools have, we have in double. However we have quality because the professionals here are committed to achieving good results. The indicators motivate us even more to continue our journey; otherwise, we would have already lost our way.

At Amazonas State School we did not perceive the same active interest in the students’ results in the ENEM. In our interview with the principal, she stated that her students had shown a satisfactory performance in the tests, but “there’s still a long way to go” and she was working to “encourage the participation of the students.” In practice, though, we observed the opposite. At the end of 2008, we asked the principal’s assistant João about his expectation for the school and the students in the ENEM due to be held the following week. He said: “I don’t know how many students are enrolled in the ENEM. As the enrolments are now online, the school doesn’t know how many are taking part.”

At Olavo Moura School, the students were encouraged to participate in innumerable essay competitions and contests in various subjects. On one of the days of the maths contests, we were surprised to encounter students from all the class groups doing the tests and discussing them in the corridors.

At Amazonas State School students were stimulated to take part in the maths contests, but the results were not widely advertised in the School: rather, they were posted on an out-of-the-way notice board.

At Olavo Moura School, when the external test results were published, various students were invited to the award ceremonies, recounted

as a source of pride by the principal Ritinha, who said she “insisted on being present at all the student award ceremonies.” The valorisation of these students was such that the winners were dubbed ‘star students.’ Everyone in the school learnt when someone obtained a good place in an essay competition or a contest. Usually the principal would invite these students to a ceremony and a photo of them would be taken next to the school flag to be circulated later at the school councils, at parents’ meetings and in the principal’s report.

In July/August 2008, the students from Year 3 took SAERJ’s Portuguese Language and Maths exams. When the results were published, the principal commemorated the performance of the students, who had obtained adequate results according to the proficiency criteria of the exam and far above the average for the State of Rio de Janeiro.

When the State Education Office decided to award notebooks as prizes to the students obtaining the best marks in the external assessment, the students from Olavo Moura School were the most rewarded. The staff members invited the 67 students who had obtained the best marks to turn up at the School without telling them the motive. They were surprised by an enormous poster containing a photo of each student and the text: “Congratulations to the star students for their results in the SAERJ assessment.”

This same prize was awarded to eight students from Amazonas State School. The principal Giovana accompanied them at the award ceremony. The school’s students obtained an ‘intermediate’ level according to the exam’s proficiency criteria. The students winning the award were congratulated by the principal: “You show that dedication to studies is the best route to success.”

The expectations of the principals concerning their students were similar to those observed in the classrooms and reproduced by the teachers. Participant observation allowed us to identify two types of classroom that we shall briefly describe. The first reflects belief in the students and the possibility of everyone learning, while the second describes the opposite process.

The group from Year 1 of secondary education who we accompanied at Olavo Moura School were considered “rowdy and noisy” by their

teachers. When we arrived, the class had already filled up with all 32 students sat in double rows. During the lesson the teacher Simone went over the questions from the first chemistry test. The two boys seated in front of us copied the replies from the notebook of another student, who was sitting in the middle row. The students said that this lesson was “the most difficult of all” and that the teacher was very quick and demanding.

The teacher asked whether the class had done their homework. In the previous lesson, the teacher Simone had written on the blackboard a lengthy summary of homogenous and heterogeneous chemical mixtures and handed out an exercise sheet. More than once the teacher asked whether everyone had done their homework and if anyone had any queries. The response from the students was silence. Simone then said that she would explain something very important:

Understand something. We’re not a municipal school here. I’m not checking to see whether your notebook is neatly organized or whether you have nice handwriting, there are no marks for who did everything. The homework is to be done at home! But if you don’t do it, it’s your problem. If you think that the summaries given in class are unimportant, don’t copy them. But be aware that the test is very elaborate because I work with the cream of the municipality, people who make a habit of studying, so I’m going to demand a lot in the exam. Chapters 8 and 9 are concepts and vocabularies; you should read them at home. They won’t be in the exam, but you need to know them. Any questions? [She herself answered.] No. So I can carry on with the revision.

The idea that the students were the ‘cream’ – that is, the best of the municipal schools – was widespread among the staff members and teachers, and reaffirmed by the students themselves in the classes. This conception enabled greater investment in teaching, in the reinforcement of subjects that the students found difficult, and especially in situations in which the basic shortcomings in their education was exposed – as the chemistry teacher did in observing that “in terms of content, the students were not as good as they appear.” Even so, the belief was that

the students could learn since they had been ‘filtered’: as the pedagogical coordinator said, “it’s enough to be patient and teach because these kids will go far.”

At Amazonas School, we observed the maths teacher’s first class of the year. The students from Year 1 went a month without a class since the professor was on medical leave. The teacher left the staff room 20 minutes after the bell rang for the start of the period. She began the double-period lesson with the student register and, perceiving the number of absent students, told the class: “You’ve been missing a lot of classes. Especially after the second semester. But that’s good because that way we can work with a select group.”

Next she explained to the 25 students present, four of them repeating the year, the definition of sine, cosine and tangent, stressing that they had to “memorize the definitions. Everything’s in the book.” Some students asked questions, others noted down what was on the blackboard, and another group chatted and passed each other messages. Perceiving the students’ unrest, the teacher said: “I can tell already, even though I arrived today, that class 3 is calm and class 4, yours, is agitated.” After the explanation the teacher wrote some exercises on the blackboard for the students to complete. Next she marked the work with the assistance of two students.

Two students, a boy and a girl, talked during the activity. After a while the teacher remarked: “Don’t fall into her trap, because she’s already been failed.” The female student was repeating a year. After the lesson, the teacher emphasized how she had been at the School for four years and that she only gave lessons “to those who want to attend lessons. I push the level upwards not downwards and naturally the students who want to learn will sit at the front of the classroom.”

The idea that some students wanted to learn while another group would end up repeating the year was widespread among the principal, assistant principals and teachers at Amazonas School. Repetition was accepted by the school team with the argument that the students were to blame for this process. In many cases, the students accepted repeating a year, blaming themselves for their own ‘failure.’ In other cases, though, they justified the fact by blaming the school and teachers for their repetition.

Final considerations

In this article we have described two public secondary education schools in the city of Rio de Janeiro, focusing on the institutions' selection process and management cultures. Both the schools form part of the same state education system, but they have distinct principles, rules, logics, practices and rituals that help us to reflect on the production, reproduction and overcoming of educational inequalities.

We began the description by presenting the selection mechanisms existing in the two schools. Olavo Moura State School selects students on entry. The idea in the school was that all their students have the potential to learn, but it is the School's task to teach and improve them in order for them to be able to attain their objectives, which extend beyond secondary education to include entering the work market and pursuing higher education.

Amazonas State School has universal access, similar to other schools from the state education system. Any young person can obtain a place at the school by applying through the system developed by the State Education Department. However our work reveals that students are also selected, only over the three years of secondary education. The overall repetition rate at the institution over the three years of secondary education is 44%, with approximately 60% of the students in Year 1 of secondary education were failed or left the school before the end of the school year.

Despite the equality in terms of access to the School made possible by a universal system, the practices and rituals naturalize the exclusion of students who repeat years. Selection forms an integral part of the School's pedagogy and is accepted as natural and inevitable by everyone.

Selection is thus something that simultaneously distinguishes and unites the two institutions. Both conduct some kind of selection of their students and believe that it is necessary to select them in order for the school to carry out its mission. One institution selects on entry, by merit, and after the selection of the best candidates believes that all of them have the potential to advance in their studies. The other institution is unable to select on entry, but uses selection mechanisms over the course of secondary education, such as repetition, change in session (morning,

afternoon or evening) and, above all, a disbelief in its students capacity to learn, which leads to the exclusion of some of the students.

Our work also reveals that the two selection practices are reinforced by the principals and their management cultures (Maggie & Pires do Prado 2014). Each institution has principles that produce rituals, rationalize their practices and create expectations and beliefs around the students' capacity to learn.

Olavo Moura State School exemplifies a bureaucratic-rational management culture. It has a principal who adheres to all the regulations set by the State Education Department and who is directly involved with the school's mission of teaching all its students, valorising merit. The principal works with rational objectives that are recognized by her team of teachers. She exerts her leadership with the teaching staff and employees through her presence at administrative and pedagogical meetings. In this way, she constructs an ethos shared by the management team, teachers and employees that stimulates a positive view of all the students.

The scenario encountered at Amazonas State School is different and can be described as a charismatic management culture. The principal works in compliance with SEEDUC's rules and believes that just some of her students, those who 'want to,' will benefit from the educational investment provided by the teaching staff. The principal exerts a 'charismatic' leadership, in Weber's terms, but makes use of bureaucratic mechanisms to comply with external demands. The principal of Amazonas School builds an ethos shared by the management team, teachers and employees alike that dwells on the positive image of some students, those who will manage to achieve the goal of completing secondary education. This ethos naturalizes the exclusion of almost half of the students who, over the course of secondary education, cease to frequent the classrooms.

The two cultural forms of administration that we used to describe the rituals, practices and ethos of the two schools are interchangeable. The construction of ideal types allows us to show that the rational bureaucratic type is characterised by a belief in the merit and capacity of all students. The belief that characterizes the charismatic type is that only a few students have merit and capacity to learn. This helps understand the difference in style between the two principals. In the first case, the principal aims to recognize and follow the objectives and

goals imposed legally by the State Education Secretariat. The principal of the second school is more charismatic in that she aims to fulfil her own personal mission.

Despite finding distinct management cultures, which perceive the family background of the students in diametrically opposite ways, we nonetheless encountered a positive belief in the performance of the students at both schools. While in Olavo Moura School this belief appears in the first year of secondary education, at Amazonas School it surfaces after some students have acquired a set of practices and knowledge essential to the school culture. However, in the case of Amazonas School, this positive belief is not reflected in incentives to take part in competitions and external assessments, as occurs at Olavo Moura School. At both institutions the positive belief in the students is consolidated after the students have been selected.

Our work concluded that the management cultures are essential to organizing the teaching institutions and to composing the representations and practices of the social actors. Nevertheless, the selection process undertaken in both institutions, whether on entry or over the course of secondary education, excludes some students. Selection and belief in merit exist at both schools and reinforce the notion that education is not for all.

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