

Beginner pedagogical coordinators: Training and challenges of the profession in Maranhão

Camila Castro Dinizⁱ 

Federal University of Maranhão, São Luís, MA, Brazil

Lélia Cristina Silveira de Moraesⁱⁱ 

Federal University of Maranhão, São Luís, MA, Brazil

Abstract

This article aims to analyze the challenges of the transition from the role of teacher to a pedagogical coordinator in the context of Maranhão. We used reference some findings extracted from a Master's research, of a qualitative and exploratory nature, based on the historical-dialectical method, completed in 2018. The theoretical contribution was supported by the contributions of authors such as Lima (2017), Melo (2015), and others. The findings of this study which made use of semi-structured interviews conducted with three pedagogical coordinators from Rosário and Santa Inês, in Maranhão, indicate that when they are beginners, in addition to bureaucratic and emergency issues, these coordinators face other challenges, such as: lack of specific training, autonomy and interpersonal relationships. It is concluded that more support and appreciation policies are necessary to be built in favor of these professionals so that their identity and practice are consolidated in schools.

Keywords

beginner pedagogical coordinator; training; challenges.

Coordenadoras pedagógicas iniciantes: a formação e os desafios da função no Maranhão

Resumo

Este artigo busca analisar a formação e os desafios existentes na mudança da função de professora para a de coordenadora pedagógica no Maranhão. Tomaram-se como referências algumas constatações extraídas de uma pesquisa de mestrado, de natureza qualitativa e exploratória, pautada no método histórico-dialético, concluída no ano de 2018. O aporte teórico teve a contribuição de: Lima (2017), Melo (2015), entre outros. Os achados deste estudo, que recorreu a entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas com três coordenadoras pedagógicas, de Rosário e Santa Inês, no Maranhão, apontam que, quando iniciantes, além de questões burocráticas e emergenciais, essas coordenadoras enfrentaram outros desafios, como: ausência de formação específica, falta de autonomia e relacionamento interpessoal. Concluiu-se que mais políticas de apoio e de valorização devem ser construídas para que a identidade e a prática desses profissionais sejam consolidadas nas escolas.

Palavras-chave

coordenadoras pedagógicas iniciantes; formação; desafios.

**Coordenadores pedagógicos principiantes:
formación y desafíos del trabajo en Maranhão****Resumen**

Este artículo busca analizar la formación y los desafíos que implica el cambio del rol de profesora al de coordinadora pedagógica en Maranhão. Se tomaron como referencias algunos de los hallazgos de un estudio de investigación de maestría, de carácter cualitativo y exploratorio, basado en el método histórico-dialéctico, finalizado en 2018. El aporte teórico provino de: Lima (2017), Melo (2015), entre otros. Los hallazgos de este estudio, que utilizó entrevistas semiestructuradas con tres coordinadoras pedagógicas de Rosário y Santa Inês, en el estado de Maranhão, indican que, cuando comenzaron, además de las cuestiones burocráticas y de emergencia, estas coordinadoras enfrentaron otros desafíos, tales como: falta de formación específica, falta de autonomía y relaciones interpersonales. Se concluye que es necesario establecer más políticas de apoyo y de valorización para que la identidad y la práctica de estos profesionales se consoliden en las escuelas.

Palabras clave

coordinadoras pedagógicas iniciantes; formación; desafíos.

1 Introduction

According to Lima (2017), a pedagogical coordinator's professional career, including the reasons for choosing this new role, is reflected in their performance and the development of a new emerging professional. In this way, "[...] much of this new professional is due to the one who has been in the classroom for many years" (Lima, 2017, p. 81), highlighting the importance of this professional having, above all, teaching experience to perform this role.

For Melo (2015, p. 15), the transition that the pedagogical coordinator faces in a new role is:

[...] resulting from the negotiation between previous identities and experiences as a teacher and, more broadly, as a socio-historical being, along with the new representations, relationships, and experiences that are being built in the practice of coordination.

Although the teaching experience is useful to the young coordinator, she does not fully meet all her needs. It is common for this professional to need some time until she feels completely comfortable in her new role (Melo, 2015). In light of this, the question arises: what are the formative needs and challenges faced by those transitioning from the role of teacher to that of pedagogical coordinator? Based on this issue, the general

objective of this article is to analyze the training and challenges involved in the transition from teacher to pedagogical coordinator in schools, focusing on the reality of Maranhão.

To support this investigation, we used theoretical contributions from authors who study professional initiation in pedagogical coordination and the work of pedagogical coordinators, such as Lima (2017), Melo (2015), and others. The relevance of this study lies in highlighting the trajectory of the pedagogical coordinators researched, emphasizing their training and the challenges faced when assuming this new professional identity. The article thus seeks to provide insights for reflection on concrete actions to support and valorize these professionals, who still face difficulties, particularly due to the lack of consolidation of their roles in schools and the weaknesses related to their identity and training.

Based on this, this article is organized into three additional sections besides this introduction. In the second section, we discuss the methodological procedures of the research; in the third, we present the analysis of the results and the theoretical discussion; finally, we conclude with some possible conclusions.

2 Methodology

To address the problem of this study, we chose a qualitative research design with a descriptive character, as it is directed toward the analysis of concrete cases in their local and temporal peculiarities, as highlighted by Flick (2009), which allows us to delve deeply into the context of the action of the involved social actors.

It is worth highlighting that this article comes from research made between 2016 and 2018 on the Graduate Program in Education (PPGE) of the Federal University of (UFMA), approved by Plataforma Brasil¹, which aimed, by using data collection techniques such as observation, semistructured interviews, and analysis of legal documents, discuss two fundamental categories: the training and practices of pedagogical coordinators in public schools in Maranhão. In this way, it involved analyzing the training of pedagogical

¹ The dissertation research project was then submitted to UFMA's Ethics Committee (CEP), which is a collegiate body with the objective of analyzing research proposals involving human beings, ensuring the interest of the participating subjects in their integrity and dignity, in accordance with Resolutions No. 510/2016 and No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS) (Diniz, 2018).

coordinators who took part in the specialization course in Pedagogical Coordination² conducted in the light of the National School of Managers Program.

Three pedagogical coordinators were chosen for this study and interviewed in the aforementioned research. Thus, for ethical reasons and aiming to preserve their identities, they were identified as pedagogical coordinators A, B, and C. The criteria for choosing them were because they were all novice pedagogical coordinators with up to four years of experience in this role (only pedagogical coordinator A had one and a half years experience in this role at the time of the research), with initial training in Pedagogy and working in basic education schools in the state and municipal schools in Maranhão.

The procedures for organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the information were based on data triangulation, based on Yin (2001), interpreted in the light of historical-dialectical materialism. This approach was considered appropriate for this study since there is no denying that subject and object “[...] meet together before a reality that is common to them and that challenges them to be known and transformed” (Gamboa, 2012, p. 45 *apud* Diniz, 2018, p. 14).

With these considerations in mind, we now present the theoretical analysis and discussion of this study, highlighting the choice, training, and challenges that permeate the role of novice pedagogical coordinators in the context of Maranhão.

3 Results and discussion

When speaking of professional paths, we are led to revisit the meanings and experiences that led the subjects to build their existence, identifying who they were and what they became during this process. According to Huberman (1995), the first five years of a teacher's career have unique characteristics and are considered a decisive and fundamental stage in defining the future of the teacher's career.

From this point of view, we believe that the initiation in pedagogical coordination is also a stage full of intense and significant learning so that this professional can reach their stage of professional stability. In fact, according to Ferri (2013), it is common for

² This course, developed in distance learning mode, with a total of 420 hours, involved the participation of ten hubs in Maranhão - São Luís (hubs 1 and 2), Rosário, Pinheiro, Itapecuru-Mirim, Santa Inês, Bacabal, Codó, Presidente Dutra and São João dos Patos (Diniz, 2018).

teachers at this stage to get involved in new activities in the school, diversify their field of work, and experience periods of maturation with the new role.

Given this, we present below the identification of the pedagogical coordinators participating in this investigation, showing their locations, genders, ages, total years of experience as teachers, and the stage/modality of teaching in which they work (verbal information)³.

Table 1 – Identification of the pedagogical coordinators by location, gender, age, total years of experience as a teacher, and stage/modality of education in which they work

Pedagogical coordinator	Location	Gender	Age	Years as teachers	Stage/Modality of teaching
A	Rosário	Female	51 years old	27 years	Youth and Adult Education (YAE)
B	Rosário	Female	36 years old	8 years	Regular High School (1st to 3rd grades)
C	Santa Inês	Female	47 years old	23 years	YAE

Source: Research data (2018).

As shown in the table, the group of pedagogical coordinators surveyed is made up entirely of women. Their age range varies between 30 and 50 years, with two pedagogical coordinators working in the YAE modality and only one belonging to regular high school, with two pedagogical coordinators belonging to the municipality of Rosário and one from Santa Inês, in Maranhão (Diniz, 2018). Regarding the schools where they worked as pedagogical coordinators during the research period, they basically all had the same administrative staff and physical structure (Diniz, 2018). However, it is worth noting that in these schools the Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP) was out of date, which is a worrying factor when we consider that pedagogical coordination involves the articulation of this important document, in the opposite direction of the school walking “[...] without projects, without structure, just improvising short-term solutions in order to survive in the face of bureaucratic demands” (Franco, 2016, p. 17). In the case of the pedagogical coordinators surveyed, let's take a look at how they were chosen and trained and what challenges they faced in their new role.

³ The information concerning pedagogical coordinators A and B was obtained through a semi-structured face-to-face interview on June 26, 2018, and the information regarding pedagogical coordinator C was obtained through a semi-structured face-to-face interview on June 20, 2018.

3.1 From teachers to pedagogical coordinators: choosing the new role

As Teixeira (2009) emphasizes, we can't deny that novice pedagogical coordinators have to face difficulties that are inherent at the beginning of any new assignment. Thus, by diversifying their field of work, they go through a daily process of consolidating knowledge and skills that are crucial to their personal and professional growth. With this in mind, we asked the researchers about the reasons that led them to become pedagogical coordinators.

Pedagogical coordinator *A* told us that she had been working as a teacher at her school since 1994, and had been doing so for around 27 years, but had been appointed to the position of pedagogical coordinator by the Regional Education Unit (URE) in Rosário. However, she had previously worked as a pedagogical supervisor in another state school that had been municipalized. At the time of the research, she was working around 40 hours a week in the YAE modality and also held the position of assistant manager at the same institution.

Pedagogical coordinator *B* started working as a pedagogical coordinator on the recommendation of her manager. However, even though she was appointed, she told us in her statement that if she could, she would have chosen teaching coordination to work in all her life. However, before taking on this role, she had already been working as a teacher for around eight years, working 60 hours a week during the period in which this research was carried out, while still working as a teaching coordinator at another institution.

Pedagogical coordinator *C* was also appointed to work in pedagogical coordination at her school, but on the recommendation of the Santa Inês Municipal Department of Education (Semed), given that this school was experiencing serious dropout problems with the YAE modality. This choice was justified by her excellent performance in another school in the municipal network with this public. Even so, she argues that, despite having been appointed, what most motivates her to remain in this position is her interest in education. On this point, her following statement is interesting:

[...] I love what I do because I've always seen this lack since I've spent most of my life in the classroom and didn't have a person to give me some support,

monitor, and... bring suggestions, different techniques, and I've always thought I could do that, make a difference, because I've already been on the other side, I'm on the other side, and I put myself in the teacher's shoes, and I'd like that communication that could stimulate me, articulate with me. So this passion for all this has involved me and continues to drive me, and that's what I want for my life (Pedagogical Coordinator C).

In this coordinator's case, she had already worked as a teacher for 30 years and had a weekly workload of 20 hours as a pedagogical coordinator, but she was still working as a teacher in another institution at the time of this research.

Therefore, we observed that entry into the pedagogical coordination function can occur in a variety of ways, including the appointment of professionals with a degree in Pedagogy or any other degree, as long as they have experience as teachers. Thus, the characteristic of these pedagogical coordinators of having good experience as teachers, before working in pedagogical coordination, is related to the very history of pedagogical coordination being structured as a function of the teaching profession, and not as a position (Alves, 2007).

In this sense, being a teacher is a *sine qua non*-condition for working as a pedagogical coordinator, “[...] both in terms of legal requirements and in order to better understand relationships and, more specifically, pedagogical aspects at school” (Waldmann, 2006, p. 91). Therefore, the choice of this role is conditioned by both personal aspects and by the experience of these individuals as teachers, so they are not totally inexperienced, since they have already followed the work of other pedagogical coordinators in their teaching career.

According to Teixeira (2009), with whom we agree, this does not mean denying the difficulties inherent in starting a new profession, since, mainly due to the lack of experience in pedagogical coordination, the novice pedagogical coordinator, as reinforced by Melo (2015), can face very complex problems and challenges in their daily lives. On the other hand, the context of coordination is different from that of the classroom, which is why we believe that the novice pedagogical coordinator, even if they have a lot of experience as a teacher and even when this experience is supported by a reflective and investigative nature, is not entirely ready to fulfill their role (Gomboeff, 2022).

3.2 From teachers to pedagogical coordinators: the training and the challenges of practicing in the new role

According to Lima (2017), studying and seeking help from literature to face daily challenges is a necessary path not only for beginner pedagogical coordinators but also for those dedicated to educational issues. In this regard, it is observed that, in order to tackle pedagogical coordination, even if independently, coordinators at the beginning of their careers need to deepen their understanding of theoretical frameworks related to this field. This is reinforced by Oliveira (2021, p. 184), who emphasizes that:

The beginner pedagogical coordinator, much like the teacher, being in a period marked by insecurities, anxieties, and challenges, requires formative and professional support that allows them to analyze educational issues beyond their previous practical experiences with teaching.

In line with this statement, the pedagogical coordinators interviewed also highlighted their desire to seek theoretical frameworks through the specialization course in Pedagogical Coordination, held from 2015 to 2016, that would help them improve their practice.

Thus, in an effort to perform her work with greater excellence, pedagogical coordinator B said: *“I am a teacher, but since I arrived here at the school, I was given this role and I also needed to have a theoretical background, to have more knowledge of the role I was performing [...] and to improve”*.

Based on this, we emphasize that the pedagogical coordinator in the school does a different job from the teacher, being the main link that guides the pedagogical work of the school group. According to Sousa (2001), teachers deal directly with their pupils in an attempt to understand what they know and what they need to learn, while the pedagogical coordinator has to take care of teachers' needs, especially with regard to their training, their relationship with pupils and teaching-learning strategies. The pedagogical coordinator leads different actors in the school, but they perform work that is common and of the utmost importance for the quality of education.

However, as pedagogical coordinator C emphasized, this training process did not end with this course. According to this coordinator, this training: *“[...] was another step in this process of training as a pedagogical coordinator, which is not over, because every day it continues, every day I learn and relearn, I exchange experiences with colleagues”*

(Pedagogical coordinator C). Therefore, in addition to theoretical enrichment, continuing training in the area of pedagogical coordination is capable of allowing these subjects to socialize more, promoting the exchange of experience between peers and confrontation with reality, overcoming the isolation that is characteristic of those who start in a new profession.

In the same sense, for Domingues (2009 *apud* Diniz, 2018), the pedagogical coordinator's role should include, in addition to organizing time/space in the school, getting closer to the teachers' training needs. It is with this clarity that their primary function should be the ongoing training of teachers that most of the pedagogical coordinators interviewed when asked what their real function is in the school, emphasized:

I'm with the teacher, guiding, helping when necessary, and guiding in the areas of planning, assessment; the other manager and I are always in partnership, also helping with the content (Pedagogical coordinator A).

The real task would be the teacher's ongoing training, but in view of various external and internal factors, we try to promote this training in a simpler way, but so that it happens [...] bringing some suggestions in the planning, which is still a mini-training, where they receive information and guidance on how to put this into practice in the classroom, remembering that they are suggestions, which they can accept or not and improve. For me, I always put teaching first because, in my opinion, it is the essence of everything; if it works well, the other things will fall into place (Pedagogical coordinator C).

However, despite these statements, one of the teachers interviewed at pedagogical coordinator A's school emphasized that, in reality, this coordinator still had an "intermediary" practice in school management, since her decision-making power was not total and she lacked a certain amount of autonomy.

Pedagogical coordinator B, on the other hand, admitted to us that in her practice she does more supervisory work than actual coordination with the teachers. She said the following:

As a coordinator, I do more supervisory work. For me, supervision is more about monitoring, because I work a lot with data and we have performance charts, which are in the coordinator's folder [...] we also check this and teacher class deficits; I'm the one who does this counting too and I know that this is more administrative than pedagogical, and I do it. I'm also the one who informs them: 'Look, so-and-so didn't come, so we have to reassign them, and I do this job that I see a lot of supervision doing [...]' (Pedagogical coordinator B).

She also confessed that she doesn't feel fully supported by her school's management. This feeling of isolation in the role is supported by Pereira (2013, p. 76) who says that the pedagogical coordinator and managers need moments for exchange, dialogue, and socialization of ideas and experiences, because: "[...] if teachers find support in each other, with whom would the pedagogical coordinator share their anxieties?". Along these lines, Gomboeff and Passos (2022, p. 3) add: "When the pedagogical coordinator is somehow not supported or accompanied in their professional insertion, it is common for the quality of their work to be compromised and for the whole school to be affected".

We also noticed that, even when they are clear about the role they have to play in the school in order to provide effective pedagogical support to the teachers, the pedagogical coordinators find it difficult to put their real role into practice, sometimes acting without autonomy over what falls to them in management. In the case of pedagogical coordinator *B*, in particular, we can see that, with the emphasis on the demands of the system, her work does indeed take on a supervisory character. We need to be attentive to this situation, especially considering that, as beginners, they lack a more detailed and conscious understanding of their real work in the school (Melo, 2015).

In this sense, Goodson's (2022) warning is valid: if the focus of business reformers is on the group of professionals who see the teaching profession as a mere job, little will actually change in terms of their performance and motivation, since this group tends to accept the new government guidelines, curricula and national objectives, becoming easy prey and obedient to these reforms, which are more concerned with the results and technical aspects of the teaching profession.

Despite the challenges faced in this role, in addition to bureaucratic and emergency issues, the interviewees highlighted other difficulties in this role, mainly related to interpersonal relationships with teachers and difficulties in providing training in schools. According to pedagogical coordinator *A*, the lack of commitment on the part of some teachers to fulfill their tasks and the lack of interest on the part of students and parents in monitoring their children's school life are major challenges.

According to pedagogical coordinator *B*, the difficulties of her role revolve around two aspects: the deviation of function and the resistance of some teachers, especially with regard to planning and observing their practice in the classroom.

Pedagogical coordinator C, on the other hand, pointed to the partnership with the headteacher in every sense and the “*alignment of teachers*” as the main difficulties in her role. According to her, “[...] *there’s always going to be that teacher who’s more committed, that teacher who’s slower and you’re there guiding them, helping them, but they want to do it anyway*” (Pedagogical coordinator C). Thus, despite her concern with planning, in which she listens to and discusses with the teachers, pedagogical coordinator C says: “[...] *on a day-to-day basis, you don’t see the applicability of this discussion, and that’s an obstacle too*”.

According to Ribeiro (2016, p. 59), in order to deal with the dilemmas of the job, the pedagogical coordinator at the start of their career needs to overcome some obstacles, such as: “[...] improving their own training, establishing relationships of harmony, respect, and professionalism, building collective work based on the discussion of ideas [...]”. In view of this, it is considered that the quality of interpersonal relationships at school is responsible for making us more committed professionals in order to achieve the school's objectives, and this should be a pursuit for pedagogical coordinators, since they deal directly with teachers. In the specific case of the pedagogical coordinator, Almeida (2001, p. 78) also points out that directing “[...] teachers to define common objectives and pursue them together is a task that will not be achieved unless a cohesive group is formed, although cohesion is a slow and difficult process”.

Regarding their training role, the pedagogical coordinators surveyed also stressed as major challenges the itinerancy and turnover of teachers, who are often forced to “jump” from one school to another to teach, and the pedagogical coordinator finds it impossible to carry out this role collectively, with the vast majority of this training being done by outside institutions. This is reinforced by pedagogical coordinator B when she says that: “[...] *someone from outside always comes. This year, we only had one training session, but it was with a trainer who came from outside, hired, because then they have to generate a certificate [...]*”. She also emphasized the following:

[...] I end up putting the training issue aside because I get involved in other matters, even administrative ones. Precisely because of this shortage of administrative staff, we do secretarial work, we do supervisory work [...] we go out distributing these burdens and end up having a deviation of function as well, and then the main function we end up leaving aside, and we are aware of this, we are aware of this (Pedagogical coordinator B).

Concerning this, it is necessary to revive the training role of pedagogical coordinators in schools and to make teachers co-responsible for their professional development, in order to promote reflection in this space that goes beyond the mere exchange of “activity recipes”, as business reformers try to focus on. In the case of those who are just starting out in this role, this issue is even more essential, since even when pedagogical coordinators have ongoing training as the object of their work, they have come up against obstacles that prevent them from carrying out training in which theory and practice are articulated from a perspective of transforming reality.

It is therefore important that, from the moment they start in this role, pedagogical coordinators are aware of the importance of their work as trainers. This confrontation between theory and reality, however, implies a constant rethinking of these education professionals about their practices, and this rethinking does not become easier for those who have previously worked as a teacher or have already approached aspects related to pedagogical management during their training, but extends to all professionals who, likewise, deal with the uncertainties of a new role (Diniz, 2018).

Believing that the pedagogical coordinator “[...] has the privilege of contemplating the whole school, breaking the isolation and individualism of teachers, in order to intervene and contribute to the pedagogical process” (Ferri, 2013, p. 113), we emphasize the importance of rescuing the role of pedagogical coordinators through policies to value and support these professionals, with the intention of overcoming the obstacles they face in carrying out their work, favoring the construction of their identities and the consolidation of more effective practices.

5 Closing remarks

From this study, it was possible to notice the different challenges in the change between the activities of teachers and pedagogical coordinators, which often happens without adequate training. For this reason, this function needs to be properly rethought so that the pedagogical coordinator can finally assume their role as a protagonist in the school context.

According to the reports, when leaving teaching to take on the role of pedagogical coordinator, the professionals are mainly trying to overcome the lack of

experience and specific training in the new field. In the case of the interviewees, the specialization in Pedagogical Coordination that they took part in was a positive step in terms of the implementation of training policies aimed at this area, which was fundamental for them to be able to reflect on and improve their practices, leading them to overcome their difficulties in a more conscious way.

However, other difficulties are faced in their practice when these coordinators are already familiar with the job, especially those related to job deviations and interpersonal relationships with teachers, students, and their families, as well as difficulties specific to their local school culture, such as lack of autonomy and other emergency issues. This also includes strong interference from business reformers, who end up exalting the use of techniques by teachers and competitiveness between schools, to the detriment of external evaluations, directly influencing the work of these professionals, who are prevented from performing their primary function of training teachers.

Given that this is still a new role with fragile identities, there is no doubt that the exercise of pedagogical coordination is strongly influenced by personal and collective conditions and that the process in which those starting in pedagogical coordination find themselves involved is sometimes troubled. However, beyond this, the role of the school is always to be socially and politically committed to a project of human development. From this perspective, “coordinating” must involve the intentionality of all those who wish to promote the realization of this project. To this end, greater investment must be made in valuing these individuals in terms of policies, at the beginning and throughout their careers, and efforts must be multiplied to recognize and advance them in schools.

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Camila Castro Diniz, Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA), Municipal Department of Education Rosário; Maria Benta Early Childhood Education School

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8106-6850>

Doctoral candidate and master in Education by the Graduate Program in Education (PPGE) of UFMA. Member of the research team School, Curriculum, and Teacher Training. Teacher at the Municipal Education Network of Rosário, in Maranhão.

Authorship contribution: Writing and critical reading of the article.

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1363444427321981>

E-mail: camilacastrodiniz018@gmail.com

Lélia Cristina Silveira de Moraes, Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA), Graduate Program in Education (PPGE), Department of Education II

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7330-553X>

PhD in Brazilian Education from the Federal University of Ceará (UFC). Associated Professor of Pedagogy at UFMA and at PPGE. Editor of *Revista Educação e Emancipação*.

Authorship contribution: Research and discussion advisor and proofreading of the text.

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/0326760034146239>

E-mail: lelia.silveira@ufma.br

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