

**SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AS AN INVESTIGATIVE PRACTICE: CONTRIBUTIONS OF PAULO FREIRE'S THOUGHT TO A CRITICAL AND REFLECTIVE MANAGEMENT ACTION**

**GESTÃO ESCOLAR COMO PRÁTICA INVESTIGADORA: CONTRIBUIÇÕES DO PENSAMENTO DE PAULO FREIRE PARA UMA AÇÃO GESTORA CRÍTICA E REFLEXIVA**

**LA GESTIÓN ESCOLAR COMO PRÁCTICA INVESTIGATIVA: APORTES DEL PENSAMIENTO DE PAULO FREIRE A UNA ACCIÓN GERENCIAL CRÍTICA Y REFLEXIVA**



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**ABSTRACT**

This article aims to discuss school management as an investigative practice, understanding the school manager as a reflective subject and producer of knowledge about the daily life of the school. Based on the thought of Paulo Freire and contemporary contributions from the field of educational management, the study defends research as an educational principle inseparable from managerial action. Methodologically, it is a qualitative research, of a bibliographic and analytical nature, constructed from the review of works that deal with critical pedagogy, research methodology, and school management, with an emphasis on the articulation between theory and practice. The results indicate that the adoption of an investigative posture by the school manager contributes to overcoming merely bureaucratic practices, favoring more critical, ethical, and contextualized decision-making processes. It is evident that research enables the manager to understand the school as a space for training, dialogue, and social transformation, strengthening democratic and participatory practices. It is concluded that school management, when guided by investigative principles, expands its capacity to intervene in educational reality, improving pedagogical work and contributing to the construction of a school committed to critical thinking and the emancipation of individuals, reaffirming the centrality of research in management practice.

**Keywords:** School Management. Research in Education. Investigative Practice. Paulo Freire.

**RESUMO**

Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir a gestão escolar como prática investigadora, compreendendo o gestor escolar como sujeito reflexivo e produtor de conhecimentos sobre

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o cotidiano da escola. Fundamentado no pensamento de Paulo Freire e em contribuições contemporâneas da área da gestão educacional, o estudo defende a pesquisa como princípio educativo indissociável da ação gestora. Metodologicamente, trata-se de uma pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, de caráter bibliográfico e analítico, construída a partir da revisão de obras que tratam da pedagogia crítica, da metodologia da pesquisa e da gestão escolar, com ênfase na articulação entre teoria e prática. Os resultados indicam que a adoção de uma postura investigativa pelo gestor escolar contribui para a superação de práticas meramente burocráticas, favorecendo processos de tomada de decisão mais críticos, éticos e contextualizados. Evidencia-se que a pesquisa possibilita ao gestor compreender a escola como espaço de formação, diálogo e transformação social, fortalecendo práticas democráticas e participativas. Conclui-se que a gestão escolar, quando orientada por princípios investigativos, amplia sua capacidade de intervenção na realidade educacional, qualificando o trabalho pedagógico e contribuindo para a construção de uma escola comprometida com a formação crítica e a emancipação dos sujeitos, reafirmando a centralidade da pesquisa na prática gestora.

**Palavras-chave:** Gestão Escolar. Pesquisa em Educação. Prática Investigativa. Paulo Freire.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo discutir la gestión escolar como una práctica investigativa, entendiendo al gestor escolar como sujeto reflexivo y productor de conocimiento sobre la vida cotidiana de la escuela. Basado en el pensamiento de Paulo Freire y contribuciones contemporáneas del campo de la gestión educativa, el estudio defiende la investigación como un principio educativo inseparable de la acción gerencial. Metodológicamente, es una investigación cualitativa, de naturaleza bibliográfica y analítica, construida a partir de la revisión de trabajos que abordan la pedagogía crítica, la metodología de la investigación y la gestión escolar, con énfasis en la articulación entre la teoría y la práctica. Los resultados indican que la adopción de una postura investigativa por parte del gestor escolar contribuye a superar las prácticas meramente burocráticas, favoreciendo procesos de toma de decisiones más críticos, éticos y contextualizados. Es evidente que la investigación permite al gestor comprender la escuela como un espacio de formación, diálogo y transformación social, fortaleciendo las prácticas democráticas y participativas. Se concluye que la gestión escolar, cuando se orienta por principios investigativos, amplía su capacidad de intervención en la realidad educativa, perfeccionando el trabajo pedagógico y contribuyendo a la construcción de una escuela comprometida con el pensamiento crítico y la emancipación de los individuos, reafirmando la centralidad de la investigación en la práctica gerencial.

**Palabras clave:** Gestión Escolar. Investigación en Educación. Práctica Investigativa. Paulo Freire.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This article originates from the final synthesis of the discipline of Scientific Methodology of the Specialization Course in School Management at the Federal University of São Carlos - UFSCar, whose formative proposal included studies on research ethics, the functioning of the ethics committee and the prevention of academic plagiarism, as well as the delimitation of the object of investigation of the definition of the theme, problem, justification and objectives, the literature review with emphasis on the state of the art, and the discussion of methodological strategies, highlighting the complementarity between qualitative and quantitative approaches, the types of research focused on case studies and intervention projects, the techniques and instruments of data collection, in addition to the treatment, analysis and presentation of the results, always guided by ABNT standards.

In this path, the reflection developed resulted from the study of the work "Methodology of Scientific Research for School Managers: Research as a Practice of Training and Transformation" by Chiari (2025) articulated with the thought of Freire (2002) especially from the work "Pedagogy of Autonomy: Knowledge Necessary for Educational Practice", grounding the understanding of contemporary school management, as a research practice, critical and reflective.

In the context of the contemporary demands of public education, it is problematized to what extent school management has been constituted, in fact, as an investigative practice guided by critical and reflective principles, or if it remains restricted to technical-bureaucratic procedures that empty its formative and transformative potential.

Although the normative frameworks emphasize democratic and participatory management, it is observed, in the reality of school institutions, the predominance of administrative routines that have little dialogue with the systematic investigation of practice and with the collective construction of knowledge. In this sense, the present reflection is justified by the need to strengthen a conception of management based on research as a formative principle, articulating the methodological contributions discussed in the training in school management to the thought of Freire (2002), especially in this work, in which he defends the educational practice as a permanent exercise of critical reflection on action.

Thus, it is based on the hypotheses that (i) the incorporation of research as a constitutive dimension of management enhances more democratic and contextualized decision-making processes; (ii) the critical appropriation of Freire's foundations contributes to resignifying the role of the manager as a political-pedagogical subject; and (iii) the articulation between research and practice favors the construction of an institutional culture guided by autonomy, ethics and social transformation.

Thus, understanding school management as an investigative practice, in the light of Freire's thought, implies recognizing research as a constitutive principle of management action and as a path to the construction of a democratic, critical and socially committed school. This article aims to discuss school management as a space for investigation, highlighting the centrality of research for the qualification of management practice and for the strengthening of the school as a locus of knowledge production and human emancipation.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The present research is characterized, as to the approach, as qualitative, as it seeks the understanding and critical interpretation of theoretical conceptions related to educational public policies and the training of school managers. Such an approach is adequate to the objective of the study, which consists of critically reflecting on the influence of educational policies on the performance of the school manager and on the realization of the right to education, considering the social contexts and ideological disputes that permeate its formulation and implementation.

Regarding the nature, it is a basic research, since it is dedicated to the expansion of theoretical knowledge on the subject, without the immediate intention of practical application or direct intervention in specific educational contexts. The study seeks to contribute to the deepening of academic discussions about the relationship between the State, public policies and school management.

As for the objectives, the research has an exploratory and descriptive character. Exploratory, in that it investigates and problematizes different theoretical approaches to public educational policies and the training of school managers; and descriptive, as it systematizes and presents the main ideas, convergences and divergences among the authors analyzed, as discussed in the development of the article.

Regarding the technical procedures, the study is configured as a bibliographic research, based on the analysis of books, scientific articles and didactic materials that address the themes of the State, public policies, education and school management. The study is based on the contributions of Chiari (2025) and Freire (2002) and authors who are composed of the discussion and substantiation of opinions such as: .

The analysis of the bibliographic material occurred through systematic, interpretative and comparative reading, seeking to articulate the theoretical assumptions of the selected authors with the objective proposed in the article. This procedure made it possible to identify different conceptions about public educational policies, as well as to understand their impacts

on the formation and performance of school managers, establishing relationships between theory and practice in the context of Brazilian public education.

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For Chiari (2025) and Freire (2002), school management, in the context of contemporary basic education, faces the challenge of overcoming an action restricted to the administrative and bureaucratic dimensions, assuming a pedagogical, critical and formative role. The complex demands of the school routine require from the manager competencies that go beyond compliance with standards, requiring the ability to interpret reality, problematize practices and make decisions based on reflective and investigative processes. From this perspective, the school is configured as a legitimate space for the production of knowledge, and management comes to be understood as an educational and political practice.

Freire's (2002) thought offers consistent theoretical foundations for the understanding of school management as a research practice. In *Pedagogy of Autonomy: necessary knowledge for educational practice*, the author states that "there is no teaching without research and research without teaching", indicating that investigation is an inseparable principle of educational practice and the process of human formation. For the author, educating implies epistemological curiosity, methodological rigor and critical reflection on practice, elements that apply not only to teaching, but also to the performance of the school manager.

In this logic, the manager cannot be conceived as a mere executor of institutional policies and guidelines. On the contrary, it assumes itself as a historical, ethical and political subject, capable of critically reading the school reality and intervening in a conscious and transformative way. Freire (2002) also highlights that every educational practice requires ethical commitment, dialogue and responsible decision-making, understanding education as a form of intervention in the world

In line with this approach, Chiari (2025) argues that research, within the scope of school management, should be understood as a continuous practice of training and transformation, articulating theory, ethics, listening, and action in the daily life of the school. The author emphasizes that the investigation allows the manager to overcome an isolated and bureaucratic performance, assuming himself as a reflective educator and producer of knowledge about his own practice.

The correlation between the work of Chiari (2025) and the work of Freire (2002), especially the concept of "Teaching requires research on the Pedagogy of Autonomy",

reveals a deep and fundamental synergy for educational practice, particularly in school management. Both perspectives converge on the idea that the act of educating, and especially that of managing a school, is intrinsically linked to the investigative posture, although often masked by the practical needs of urgent situations and growing and specific demands of the school.

We must analyze these two works from the point of view where the research has aspects of Genesis of Practice and Autonomy. The text on the *Methodology of Scientific Research for School Managers* argues that research is not an activity restricted to the formal academic universe, but a daily practice of training and transformation within the school context. He argues that, by systematizing observation, data collection and analysis of the challenges and solutions found, the manager becomes a researcher of his own doing. This enables them to reflect critically, organize ideas, identify patterns, and propose more effective strategies, moving from the mere execution of tasks to strategic and grounded action.

In this perspective of the authors, the production of reports, projects and articles, in this sense, is not bureaucracy, but a means of generating local knowledge and improving management, starting from a pre-assumption that storing data is collecting information that, when analyzed, generates indicators that can serve as a basis for interventions, being completely aligned with the understanding of Freire's Pedagogy of Autonomy texts (2002, p. 14), where when addressing the requirement of research for teaching, he highlights that:

[...] There is no teaching without research and research without teaching. Those who do are found in each other's bodies. While I teach I keep searching, searching. I teach because I seek, because I inquired, because I inquire and I inquire myself. I research to verify, verifying, I intervene, intervening, I educate and I educate myself. I research to know what I don't know yet and communicate or announce the news.

This perspective dialogues directly with Freire's (2002) principle that teaching requires research. For the author, research is not an appendix of the educational process, but its own condition of existence. He argues that the educator is not a mere transmitter of content, but a subject who, when teaching, is constantly learning and researching the reality of his students, their previous knowledge, their difficulties and their potentialities. Research, for Freire, is an act of epistemological curiosity that drives pedagogical practice, making it alive, contextualized and liberating. The central correlation between the two texts lies in the idea that both teaching and managing are acts that demand an active, reflective and investigative posture. Both jobs invite us to go beyond the mere execution of tasks. Whether the manager reflects on the daily challenges of the school or the teacher investigates the reality of his students, research emerges as the essential tool for critical understanding, the

systematization of knowledge and the proposition of innovative solutions. This convergence shows us that academic rigor is not far from the school floor; on the contrary, it is what allows education to be a living practice, in constant improvement and, above all, liberating. The result is a more conscious, effective and truly transformative management and teaching. Within this assumption we can see that both works are complementary, theory and practice of an education that seeks quality.

Authors such as Demo (2003) corroborate this perspective by stating that educating through research presupposes that the educator and, consequently, the manager recognizes himself as a researcher of his own practice. For the author, the research promotes reconstructive questioning and the formation of critical consciousness, essential elements for the emancipation of subjects and for the transformation of school reality, in line with Freire's pedagogy

In the same way, Schön (1995) contributes to the understanding of the manager as a reflective professional, by highlighting that knowledge is built in and about action. Reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action strengthen the manager's ability to interpret complex situations, make reasoned decisions and re-signify practices, which dialogues with Freire's conception of critical reflection as a requirement of educational practice (Freire 2002).

In the methodological field, Minayo (2001) reinforces that every investigation carries an intentionality and a specific way of understanding reality, showing that the methodological choice is also an ethical and political choice. This understanding converges with Denzin and Lincoln (2006), when they state that the methodology reveals the researcher's position in relation to the world, to the subjects and to the knowledge, reaffirming the political character of research in education.

The discussion also points to the relevance of ethics in the investigative practice of school management. Severino (2013) highlights that educational research is, above all, a pedagogical and ethical act, based on respect for the subjects, sensitive listening and the social relevance of the investigation. This conception dialogues directly with Freire (2002) when he defends the universal ethics of the human being as an inseparable principle of educational practice and transformative action.

In addition, Marconi and Lakatos (2003) contribute by emphasizing the importance of methodological rigor in the organization of research, enabling the manager to transform empirical observations into structured scientific knowledge. Such rigor is not opposed to the reflective practice defended by Freire, but strengthens it, by avoiding activism devoid of theoretical foundation.

Finally, Franco (2005) emphasizes the centrality of active listening in the investigative

process, emphasizing that the subjects involved in the research should be understood as interlocutors and not as objects. This perspective reaffirms the principle of dialogue defended by Freire (2002) and reinforces the conception of democratic, participatory and investigative school management.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

The present study allowed us to understand school management as an essentially investigative practice, showing that the exercise of the management function cannot be limited to technical-administrative or bureaucratic actions. Throughout the analysis, it was evident that research, understood as an educational principle, constitutes a central element to qualify the performance of the school manager, favoring more critical, ethical and coherent decision-making processes with the concrete reality of the school.

In the light of Paulo Freire's thought, it is concluded that the management practice, as well as the teaching practice, requires epistemological curiosity, methodological rigor and permanent critical reflection on daily practice. Research, in this sense, is not presented as an accessory activity or restricted to the academic environment, but as a constitutive dimension of educational action and human formation, enabling the manager to assume himself as a historical subject and transformer of the school reality. This understanding reinforces the idea that there is no educational management without research, just as there is no pedagogical practice disconnected from the ethical and political commitment to social transformation.

The objectives proposed in this study were achieved by showing that school management, when based on an investigative posture, expands its capacity for critical reading of the context, listening to the subjects and articulation between theory and practice. The contributions of Chiari and the secondary authors analyzed corroborate this perspective, by demonstrating that research strengthens the training of managers, promotes intellectual autonomy and enables the construction of more democratic and participatory practices in the school space.

Thus, it is concluded that assuming school management as an investigative practice represents a necessary path for the construction of a school committed to critical education, social justice and the emancipation of subjects. Such understanding implies recognizing research as a permanent instrument of reflection, action and transformation, requiring investments in public policies aimed at the academic training of managers and the financing of research in school management, in order to strengthen the public school as a space for the production of knowledge and qualified social intervention.

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