Case Method In The Formation Of Public Education Managers: an experience in distance-learning professional graduate studies

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to analyze the application of the case study method in a Professional Master Degree Program in Education, with emphasis on management and assessment of public distance education. It presents the guidelines of the course so as to demonstrate how case studies may contribute to public school manager's education through an interdisciplinary approach and theory-practice integration. A case debate in the virtual learning environment is analyzed as a language production situation in which a process of negotiation and meaning reconstruction underpins daily processes of decision-making of Brazilian public school managers.

Keywords: case method; professional mastership; educational management.

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se investiga la experiencia de la utilización de la metodología de estudio de caso (*case method*) en un curso de maestría profesional en educación en el área de evaluación y gestión de la educación pública. Se presentan los principios orientadores y la estructura del plan de estudios, haciendo hincapié en el carácter interdisciplinario y la integración de los aspectos empíricos y teóricos que los estudios de caso desempeñan en la formación de los gestores de la educación pública como agentes capaces de efectuar un cambio efectivo en los sistemas escolares. La discusión de un caso en el entorno virtual de aprendizaje, se analiza como una situación en la que la producción del lenguaje es un proceso de negociación y reconstrucción de significados que apoyan los procesos de toma

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de decisiones en situaciones problemáticas que forman parte del cotidiano de los administradores de la educación pública brasileña.

Palabras-clave: método de caso; magister profesional; gestión de la educación.

RESUMO

No presente artigo, é analisada a experiência de utilização do método de estudo de caso (*case method*), em um curso de mestrado profissional em educação, na área de avaliação e gestão da educação pública a distância. São apresentados os princípios orientadores e a estrutura curricular do curso, enfatizando-se o caráter interdisciplinar e a integração entre aspectos empíricos e teóricos que os estudos de caso desempenham na formação dos gestores da educação pública como agentes capazes de conduzir mudanças efetivas nos sistemas de ensino. A discussão de um case num ambiente virtual de aprendizagem é analisada enquanto situação de produção de linguagem na qual ocorre um processo de negociação e reconstrução de significados, que subsidiam processos de tomada de decisão sobre situações problema que fazem parte do cotidiano dos gestores da educação pública brasileira.

Palavras-chave: método de caso; mestrado profissional; gestão da educação.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this account is to present the experience of using Case Method as backbone for organizing the Federal University of Juiz de Fora *stricto sensu* Professional Graduate Program in Public Education Management and Evaluation. The intention is to discuss the innovative features and the application potentiality of said method in a distance-learning professional Masters program. Therefore, an initial presentation of the program will be made, containing its principles, objectives, target audience and curricular organization, of which the subject "Management Practices: case studies" (CS 1) is part.

The origin of Case Method will be discussed, including its appropriation in the educational training of professionals in general and its relevance in the formation of managers in public education in a program that takes place in a virtual learning environment (VLE), organized through resources made available by the Moodle[4] platform. Finally, an analysis of the interactions evoked by one of the cases in a platform-based forum is developed. The focus of this analysis will be on the peculiarities of such interactions as specific situations of language production, their formative dimension and implications for the actions of public education managers, which are expected to become effective changes in the country's public education system.

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[4] Modular Object – Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment

THE PROFESSIONAL GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

The Professional Graduate Program (PGP) in Public Educational Management and Evaluation was created in 2009 by a joint initiative of the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Economics and Administration, and the Department of Social Sciences of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF). It is organized from the previous experience of the Center of Public Policies and Education Evaluation (CAEd), UFJF's technology research and development body acting in the development of management patterns for public education systems from actions in the following areas: (i) evaluation of elementary education; (ii) formation of managers in elementary education by offering *Lato Sensu* Graduate programs to managers of different states and short-term courses in educational evaluation; (iii) research applied to management of public education.

PGP's origin dates back to a set of institutional actions focused on the combination of research, technological development and support to the public management of elementary education with the objective of establishing communication channels between scientific production and standards, processes and management technologies for elementary education. The target audience of the professional masters program is public education managers – school principals, education secretaries, and clerks – from regions and states already covered by CAEd's action plan.

The 24-month program alternates on-site – four months at UFJF – and distance-learning activities in virtual learning environment (four terms of four months each). As partial requirement for obtaining the degree, graduating students must present a dissertation following the model of an Educational Action Plan. In general terms, the dissertation consists of a management case presentation characterized as a problem-situation for which the manager must provide a solution, adequately backed by theoretical and empirical evidence.

The program suggests a set of study themes and objects of empirical investigation aiming towards the production of knowledge and the formation of professionals capable of effectively delivering the reform of Brazil's public education, guided by professional performance standards. Although a more overarching discussion on the principles that define these patterns is outside the scope of this account, it must be highlighted that the project for the Professional Graduate Program in Management and Evaluation of Public Education was built having as references documents on professional patterns and studies on manager training in different contexts, especially those adopted by the American National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA)[5] and the Minas Gerais State Secretariat for Education[6].

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[5] The National Policy Board for Education Administration is a national consortium of the most relevant players in interested educational leadership and policies, providing a forum for actions of collaborating organizations in scholar and leadership system advancements. Among its actions is the definition of national patterns for school managers.

[6] These patterns were published in a preliminary document entitled "Study Guide for the School Manager Occupational Certification" (loosely translated from Portuguese original). www.educacao.mg.gov.br.

From research to said documents, seven standards for professional development were defined. Their reach is the object of formation actions developed by the Program. According to these standards, the public education manager should:

(i) Promote adherence from the school community to well defined objectives and propose strategies to accomplish them.

(ii) Promote the professional development of teachers and management team and a coherent, well defined teaching program.

(iii) Promote evaluation of teaching, programs and educational policies.

(iv) Promote efficient management of school's resources and teaching networks, in order to ensure the integrity of the learning environment.

(v) Promote relationships of cooperation and dialogue with the community and its organizations.

(vi) Promote commitment with democracy, equality of rights and opportunities, and fight all forms of discrimination.

(vii) Promote team involvement in processes of opinion-forming and decision-making regarding education [7].

(CAEd/UFJF, 2009, p. 14)

The innovative curriculum of the program is designed to fulfill those patterns, strongly focused on the mobilization of professional experience, the establishment of professional relationships that extend beyond the duration of the program, extensive use of research, empirical evidence and case study usage for addressing management problems. These issues come from the experiences lived by faculty and students, and from the conversations between the theoretical contributions of the different subjects in the curriculum, structured in four axes: professional formation, transversal studies, basic formation, special topics and dissertation. The ECI subject is part of the transversal studies axis.

The proposition of the subjects forming the Transversal Studies axis is to work from teaching methods that favor learning based on problem-solving skills, in a way that is shared among faculty, teachers and tutors. The goal is to part with the traditional formation based exclusively on mastering theory, advancing on to an idea of training that is capable of mobilizing theory as much as empirical knowledge production when approaching concrete problems. Approaching such problems requires teachers to build broad reference frameworks, qualifying their professional experience from conversations with their peers and knowledge obtained from different fields. The reason for this is – given the diversity of experiences and insertions in the national public education management framework of faculty – that the Program is characterized by its strong potential for dissemination of successful experiences within public education management. The formative value of such dissemination is backed by studies on professional training of

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[7] Editor's Note: all quotations originally in Portuguese were translated by the RBAAD's translation team for this publication.

teachers (TARDIF, LESSARD, 2055), which point out the relevance of conversations among the different levels involved in school management as a prerequisite for the promotion of actual changes in schools.

Within that context, the case method presents an innovative perspective for approaching educational management issues in a professional Masters program following a semi-traditional model. In addition to favoring objectification of situations specific to every-day life at teaching systems experienced by managers, and the submission of said situations to a conversation with theory and other experiences of same nature, the cases argument is benefited from available tools in virtual learning environments. The treatment of management themes based on elaboration of cases is favoring the approach of public education themes under the narrative perspective, bringing up snapshots of reality connected to broader themes at the same time. It is within that conceptual, multi-layered and interactional picture that managers must look for evidences capable of sustaining properly, informed decision-making processes, and backed both by theoretic and empirical knowledge.

THE CASE METHOD, ITS ORIGIN AND APPROPRIATION BY TEACHER TRAINING

Case method is a pedagogical tool developed by Christopher Columbus Langdell during the time he taught at the Harvard Law School, bringing radical changes in teaching methodology to a large portion of American universities (KIMBALL, 2009). Coming from a successful career as an attorney at law in the last decades of the 19th century, Langdell

proposed a perspective shift in the way young university students are prepared for the professional practice using the inductive teaching method. In an institution where the use of recitation as a technique had only been abandoned for a decade or so, and where the Law School classes were dedicated to a theoretical approach of the different legal branches, Landgell proposes to gather a series of cases from the judges' reasoning records and submit them to his students interpretation and analysis, with the purpose of offering a practical study of the law, or the study of the living law. In his 'A Selection of Cases on the Law of Contracts', published in 1870, Langdell introduces several innovative aspects, such as the vast and varied number of individual cases in a compilation, introducing a historic and geographic contextualization of facts and absence of commentaries and introductory notes, which are common to legal treaties that bring cases to illustrate the doctrines in question. Langdell introduced a new learning form regarding the transmission of content to be passively memorized, placing the student in the position of analyzing a concrete situation. Instead of general propositions, he offered students the stimulus of analyzing particular controversies, as well as the formulation of their own interpretation.

Analyzing facts, evaluating situations, weighing out opinions, and acting responsibly are actions that make up a set of skills, which can only be learned with practice, according to Langdell. This perspective was in accordance with the post-civil war climate felt across the North American society, at the time dealing with the challenge of reorganizing itself from its essentially agrarian nature, through a process of industrial revolution, population

growth, immigration and urbanization. According to Connant (1968, p. 63), by identifying the particularity of the American cultural universe as a result of the empirical-inductive "way of thinking", the industrial inventor would become the great North American hero of the time. From the steam-powered cottonseed separator, a more technological than theoretical science context can be observed, with stimulus from the federal government, fed through its universities, to the development projects for immediate consumption. It is worth noting that Langdell's initiative is contemporary to the consolidation of Pragmatism as a philosophical tradition, involving Pierce, James and – a bit later – Dewey. The tradition would be centered on the connection between theory and practice in a movement that would distance itself from the European philosophic matrixes and its generalized distrust of common sense.

The use of Case Method was spread to other teaching areas, such as administration, marketing and medicine during the 20th century. Despite strong European influence in teaching marked by the theoretical-deductive perspective, Case Method in Brazil has been presented as the result of a new mentality on the pedagogical process in the academia environment. Despite not being a recent phenomenon in education (it was a discussion topic at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1924), instruction based on Case Method has become increasingly more popular in the last decades of the 20th century. Adherence to the method clashes with recent reflections regarding the nature of pedagogical knowledge and it is coherent with the fact that educators base their actions on their own experience in contextualized situations before operating with pedagogical principles in their professional environments. The ever-changing nature of theories and principles that guide the educational activity, in a process of constant revision, has sparked training programs for Pedagogy students to emphasize the uncertain characteristic of the practice. Marseth (1996) highlights the fact that according to recent researches on education, the teacher conception has become broader and now defined as the professional that defines his or her knowledge as situational, or specific, depending on the context and always in a process of transformation. The teacher's action would then derive much from induction from multiple experiences than deduction from theoretical principles. In that sense, the case study methodology becomes a strong formative potential, as it allows for the sharing of experiences, which would induce the construction of knowledge based on them.

A case is defined by a situation presented in the form of a narrative that provides essential information for the analysis of relevant issues, recognizing the complexity of the experienced reality:

> (...) a case is a descriptive research document based on a real-life situation or event. It attempts to convey a balanced, multidimensional representation of the context, participants and reality of the situation. It is created explicitly for discussion and seeks to include sufficient detail and information to elicit active analysis and interpretation by users. (MERSETH, 1996:726)

Reality is outlined in such a way that both reflection and debate are stimulated – identifying

theoretical contributions that enlighten the interpretation of the presented situation, stimulated problem-solving and informed decision-making. By exploring complex problems of the professional practice for which theory does not provide immediate answers, case-based instruction make students conscious of the existence of multiple perspectives that define reality and of the actors' point of view, while also providing an opportunity to review their established concepts on authority and efficiency. There are no correct answers to the questions raised by the cases – some solutions are simply more plausible than others.

As such, this pedagogical strategy greatly contributes in promoting independent thinking among students, stimulating their ability to make decisions. Contrary to common belief, it does not exclude theoretical principles from the learning process – it contextualizes its existence by requiring the student to take a stand. As an innovative strategy, it strives to stimulate an interdisciplinary academic teaching approach, by preparing the professional to deal with their ever-day professional life.

As previously showed, behind the Professional Masters Program in Public Education Management and Evaluation is the proposition to renew cultural references for education management. Its curricular design brings a multidisciplinary support team in order to build the proposed new management model based on the school's autonomy and collective evaluation of educational results. In that context, the CS 1 subject has the goal of integrating the themes approached by the professional training core curriculum, using Case Method as a resource, supported on problem solving. Its focus is the transition process from a public education model centered on bureaucratic control of administrative processes from investigation of problems empirically built, whose analysis mobilizes knowledge and skills addressed by the basic subjects and their curricular components. By approaching specific issues in everyday school practice and management, CS 1 provides managers-to-be the opportunity to analyze hypothetic or real-life cases in order to reduce the gap between the theories introduced in the formation process and the actual professional practice.

APPROACHING A CASE AS FORMATIVE SITUATION FOR LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

Throughout the four months during which the CS 1 subject is offered, students are presented four management cases in the form of constructed narratives from the point of view of the actors involved in the daily activities of an elementary public school. These narratives include all elements, building the every-day life of people directly and indirectly related to the central theme. According to Ellet (2007), despite their extension or amplitude, the cases have in common the fact that they intend "(…) to represent reality, to convey situation with all its cross currents and rough edges - including irrelevancies, sideshows, misconceptions, and little information or an over-whelming amount of it." (p.13)

A summary of the proposed cases introduced to the professional Masters class of 2010 can be found on Table 1, below. The class of 120 students was divided into four groups in the Moodle platform for distance learning, which keeps records of the cases, unfolding of the themes, the discussions they generated and number of posts, including commentaries from participants to each case.

Table 1: Cases approached by the Management Practices Case Studies I subject, Class of 2011

CASE [8]	Participants	Number of Posts	Theme	Theme Unfolding
"Handout"	120	778	School autonomy X centralizing policies	Curriculum, external evaluation tests, criteria for selection of managers
"Innovative High School"	120	820	High School Identity	Adolescence and schooling, high school evasion, management of relationships within school teams
"Speed up, Brazil"	120	993	Criteria for organizing classrooms in schools	Heterogeneous X homogenous classes, criteria for the selection of managers, year failing, relationship between theory and practice in the manager formation, relationship between school and community
"Missing Education"	120	844	Teacher Absenteeism	Teacher unrest, incentive policies for teachers, minimum salary, business managements X school management

Source: Management Practices: Case Studies I. Class of 2011. Moodle Platform PPGP/UFJF.

The data presented by Table 1 show how each of the themes has mobilized the students' participation and the unfolding each theme has produced. It is possible to determine the mobilizing potential by the number of posts in each forum and by links established between the main theme and other issues. In future studies, a comparative approach analysis of these themes in different classrooms is intended, which would allow for the identification of issues particularly challenging to education management.

The referrals for case discussions are based on the five stages proposed by Ellet (idem): situation, questions, hypothesis, proof and actions, alternatives (p.28). These stages are adapted to the nature and objective of a Professional Masters Program, taught in a semi-traditional model, and geared for public education managers.

Each case is the object of discussion for two terms of two weeks each. In the first term, students are encouraged to express their opinion on the given situation, bringing elements from their own experience. In the second term, they are encouraged to express their first impressions with theoretical references from different subjects in the program or any others that can be brought by the students, with the objective of obtaining a possible solution to the issue.

The discussion created by these issues in the forums is a peculiar situation of language production in which participants interact, producing a text genre with a communicative function, which closely resembles the oral public debate. This debate makes its way to written text, where participants are able to organize their speech, responding to

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[8] TN: All case's titles were loosely translated from Portugese original.

one another with no interruption, while maintaining a dialogue with theoretical contributions from different subjects in the program and other participants, who might not be directly connected to the forums. Therefore, the peculiarity of this situation is in the possibility of bringing many different points of view together, discussing the same theme. By encouraging communication, this situation provokes reflection on particular actions on the daily lives of public education managers, who act in very different contexts and will then be able to benefit from the experience of others and appreciate them from new perspectives.

The dialogue concept used here – dialogic – was coined by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), a Russian philosopher, who was dedicated to studying language as a theme. This concept is part of a theoretical project aimed at understanding the role played by heterogeneity among subjects and social groups, manifested in and by language, in the construction of world views, positions and commitment. The term "dialogue" in Bakhtin is not referenced by or limited to face-to-face dialogue, but between texts. On this dialogical relationship, Bakhtin (1997) states that:

> It is a relationship marked by profound originality and that cannot be reduced to a relationship of logical, linguistic, psychological or mechanical order – not even a relationship of natural order. We are before a specific relationship of *meanings* whose constituent elements must be enunciated completely (or considered completely, or even potentially complete), behind which lies (and through which expresses) a real subject or potential, the author of determined statement. Real dialogue (average conversation, scientific discussion, political controversy, etc.). The existing relationship between replicas of such dialogue offers the simplest and most evident external aspect of the dialogical relationship. However, the dialogical relationship does not at all coincide with the existing relationship between the replicas of a real dialogue, as long, as varied, and as complex as they might be. Two statements, separated from each other in space and time and that know nothing from each other, reveal themselves in dialogical relationship through a confrontation of meaning, as long as there is some convergence in sense (even if it is something insignificant, in common to the theme, in point of view, etc.) (p. 353-354)

The discussion on management issues on forums establishes a convergence of meanings between those statements given by the immediate participants, and between them and other statements – theoretical texts, participants' previous experience. Ultimately, this dialogical movement is one of confrontation of meanings, which Bakhtin calls "arena", upon which are built new possibilities for approaching issues raised by case. This confrontation movement establishes an interdisciplinary movement among topics covered by the subjects in the programs' curriculum and provokes the dialogue between the managers' practice and the theoretical contribution of subjects, allowing for the rupture of dichotomies between theory and practice.

Decision-making for a concrete problem – a management issue, in this case – involves

negotiating processes and reconstruction of meanings, and it is part of the professional training's responsibility to broaden and qualify said developments. As new participants are invited into the discursive scene, they bring different perspectives and perceptions on the same phenomenon, influenced by the social position they occupy and offering highlights to experiences lived by others. This movement of *extraposition* of Bakthin's view is called exotopy. Thus, dialogue and exotopy are two concepts deeply connected that permeate the process of negotiation of meanings, which originates new possibilities of action for the subjects within reality. The Professional Masters program experience shows that the Case Method might be an interesting form to promote these negotiations and allow, as previously mentioned and as will be approached by the next topic, the negotiation between statements that often reveal conflicting orientations.

NEGOTIATION PROCESSES AND CONSTRUCTION OF MEANINGS THROUGH MANAGEMENT CASES

The proposed dynamics for discussion of management cases has the goal of provoking successive approximation and separation movements towards the approached themes, creating the opportunity to view them in different, qualitative ways. The idea is to add to the initial perception of the problem, generally originated from the students' previous experience or even common sense, an informed reflection enriched by theoretical evidence and/or new empirical evidence. This movement is the one a public education manager is expected to provide in order to

achieve the professional standards laid out in the first topic.

With the purpose of illustrating the way in which this movement happens, transcribed below are a few interactions among participants of a CS 1 discussion forum, taught to the class of 2010. The excerpts below were extracted from a 27-participant forum (26 students and a tutor) with 137 posts obtained in one month. Each post represents the insertion of a commentary from one of the participants.

The forum discusses the management case "Innovative High School", focused on the dilemmas of a pedagogical coordinator named Gloria. Working in the State public network, the protagonist is divided between the Education Secretariat demands for the development of a federal policy project for secondary education aiming towards overcoming students' low performance in external evaluation tests, and the teachers' resistance to take part. The students' job is to offer a solution to the problem faced by Gloria, at the end of the debate.

The intention is to analyze the processes of negotiation of meanings originated from the case debate and the formative dimension of said process, from the excerpts below. The participants' names have been omitted and replaced by numbers in order to preserve their identities.

PARTICIPANT 1:

Hello, Colleagues!

[Addressing one specific participant in the forum], as you have mentioned, the

School's Pedagogical Proposal in many education providers, is developed in the offices by specialists and managers to fulfill protocols and with no participation of the School Community. The principal's proposal at the school where Gloria works is not much different from the one above, where they delegate to a specialist a responsibility that belongs to all. All of the school community should be part of the project development and together find strategies to improve the school's results in the IDEB.

PARTICIPANT 2:

Well, colleagues, the raised discussion (…) permeates the argument introduced by the Reform Themes teachers regarding "in democracy's time". As we have seen, democratic actions require debate patterns. Moments of risks and exchange of experiences is often considered a "waste of time" by the school, which weakens this process.

PARTICIPANT 3:

Dear colleague and friend (…)

I do not agree with the opinion that Gloria should take on the project by herself, as I understand that despite facing trouble in order to make democratic management a reality (or even an exercise), it is vital that all take part in the development of the plan. The school makes a mistake every time it delegates to someone (always the most "competent" one) what should be built collectively, which was the case of the political-pedagogical project – it is very unlikely that the school makes that a collective process. What we should do

is reinforce the importance of everyone's engagement in the processes the school is involved.

PARTICIPANT 4:

Hello (…),

You are right, once again. When I joined the coordinating body in 2009, I was invited to participate of a managers' forum on May 12, when I heard we should develop the school's Project of Pedagogical Action (PPA) – linked to specific resources from the county to be spend on pedagogic. I had never heard of such a thing. It gets worse – the Plan had to be delivered by May 31. Although I needed help, NO ONE seemed willing (had the time, wanted to) discuss it. Someone had to do it and, just like Gloria, I had to take matters into my own hands. School community participation? Yes, there was a meeting on May 30 (Saturday), as the law requires, to hold a referendum on the Plan and allow the Secretariat to approve it. Then, [addresses participants 2 and 3], when you say all should contribute with the PPA preparation, you are absolutely correct. But when deadlines are tight and the community refuses to participate, someone in good faith and with great intentions takes responsibility and does something that makes sense, under the stress of deadlines: you either play by the rules and meet the deadlines or resources won't be available. We must rethink the times in school, as you have well said (…) [refers to another participant] in order for there to be an actual participation for the School's benefit.

PARTICIPANT 5: (after several posts from other participants)

Dear colleagues and tutor,

I believe this case is a great representation of the school/public system reality we deal with daily. After a first reading, I've listed approximately 15 topics (great for discussion) relevant for our analysis. I am trying to relate them to our theoretical sources. On the issue currently being discussed on the forum, I believe we must break the "duet" that has become evident with the "you're up now" and the "glorious Gloria" tendency, despite the best intension and the obvious professional sense of responsibility to keep the boat afloat. If you only consider the extremely tight deadline (the project had to be ready in 15 days), that would really be the best solution. However, our experience tells us that its effect will most likely be innocuous. The project greatest "thing" is precisely its power to mobilize forces, knowledge and commitment in the school community. In my point of view, that is the thesis. There is a lot to talk about regarding that operation.

The above excerpts make evident the successive processes of approximation to the urgent situation, and the reflection processes in distancing movements from the situation, provoked by the collation of conflicting opinions and the insertion of theoretical elements in the discursive scene.

Participants 1, 2 and 3 approach the case from theoretical assumptions, pointing out the principles that should ideally guide Gloria's practice, the case's protagonist. In participant 2's intervention, theory is brought into the dialogue as a strategy to support the position the supervisor should take: promote the discussion of the theme with the school community. In the first three interventions, the supervisor's action is interpreted from the meaning produced by the participants, pondering how it should ideally be dealt with. These interventions encourage participant 4 into the debate, bringing to the dialogue his/her own experiences, which are similar to the one presented by the case, adding to the initial perception of the issue. This intervention submits the previous to a confrontation with the reality of schools. Finally, in the intervention provided by participant 5, an attempt to build new meanings for the situation can be noticed. These new meanings are no longer exclusively supported on participant 4's own experience or theory, but they support themselves in a dialogue between both perspectives, searching for the problem's real determinants. Participant 5's proposal, which is to overcome partial views of the problems, calls the group to think from broader references and escaping more immediate polarizations in the search for more effective and coherent actions.

The movement of negotiation of meanings, captured by the excerpts above, indicates the importance and innovative character of methodologies that maximize the available resources in virtual learning environments, in order to promote expanded interactions. In addition, it becomes evident the possibility of academic training aimed towards the production of knowledge capable of offering answers to day-to-day challenges in the Brazilian public education system.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Professional Masters Program in Public Education Management and Evaluation introduces to the teacher training process a proposition for renewal of conventional techniques and contents to a graduate program. Firstly, it strives to adjust itself to real-life conditions of its privileged audience (managers and other working professionals in the public education network) by offering the students the opportunity to invest in training without compromising their professional activities. Secondly, by using Case Study methodology, it offers the opportunity for active construction of knowledge and reflexive process, encouraging the integration of formal content taught by the other subjects in the curriculum, as well as the connection with the public education system's reality, by bringing the daily school life to the reflexive field, along with its contradictions, operational limits, difficulties in inter and outer-school interactions, in addition to the universalization challenges in a particularly heterogeneous, and uneven social context like the Brazilian society. On the other hand, the program offers the students the possibility to discuss the government initiatives to overcome such obstacles, through incentive programs that promote quality in teaching and its many different models.

It is worth mentioning that this methodology has served as backbone for training not only in the virtual learning environment of the Moodle platform, but also during the on-site classes of content presentation and hourly load complementation, through mobilization and qualification of professional experience.

Combined with these factors, the role of the virtual environment may be highlighted, as it stimulates debate with the participation of students and mediators (tutors and teachers), promotes the interconnection of contents, establishing the negotiation of meanings underlined by academic and professional experiences, actively collaborating to the renewal of the public education management culture.

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