

*The Role of the School Manager in the Implementation of Active Methodologies  
in a Vocational Education Institution*

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The European Conference on Education 2024  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

The present study shows the role of the school manager in the implementation of active learning methodologies in an educational institution of vocational education in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. Through an online survey with open and closed questions, 33 school managers of this institution answered their actions and orientations related to the topic. It was possible to identify that 73% understand that their priority is to influence people so that they are motivated and mediate the administrative processes to reach the pedagogical ends; 99% of them agree that the manager exerts influence on the motivations and competences of the teachers. Of all, 85% state that the teacher proposes activities that allow solving problems, investigations and simulations, but 36% follow the projects of the students through the report of their team. Of the total, 97% understand that research is the methodological resource used in most classes, but 54% is not clear if teachers present knowledge in situations other than traditional ones. From all, 64% report being present at various moments in the educational discussions but, in relation to an unjustified reprobation, 33% understand that the student should retake the test and do not identify other evaluation instruments. Based on the results, it was observed that these managers acquired a repertoire for the identification and discussion of active methodologies, but still have conceptual doubts and most are not very close to the classroom, to identify, in fact, what methodology chosen by the teachers under their management.

Keywords: School Director, School Principal, School Leadership, School Manager, Active Methodologies, Mediation, Research, Real Projects

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## **Introduction**

The role of school managers has been decisive as a direct influencer of the results of the teaching-learning process (Lück, 2000). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2014) pointed out that there are no formal parameters for their role in Brazil compared to other Latin American countries.

In the literature, the school leader is described as capable of influencing people to achieve objectives voluntarily and with motivation (Lück, 2000 and 2012). It would be up to each manager to mobilize participants in the school community so that administrative mediation is carried out for pedagogical purposes to leverage ongoing and in-service training processes for their professionals (Almeida and Rubim, 2004; Paro, 2015). Research indicates that this coordination would determine the relationships in the pedagogical process (Leithwood et al, 2010; Paro 2010). Confident teachers take responsibility for their students' learning and seek active methodologies and student-centered learning (Leithwood et al, 2010).

This study focused on the school manager who works at a private, non-profit professional education institution, which defined in its school bylaws that he is responsible for school and administrative management, with the commitment to monitor and evaluate educational indicators, to improve the teaching and learning process. The principal or manager in this case, is also responsible to implement the institution's Pedagogical Proposal. This proposal states that methodologies should be more participatory, based on real work situations, through case studies, research, problem-solving, projects, and other strategies. According to this proposal, the student should be actively involved.

The principles of active teaching methodologies concern: the student as the central point of the teaching and learning process, their autonomy and reflection, the problematization of reality, teamwork, and, to support the process, a teacher as a mediator, facilitator and activator (Diesel et al, 2017). Active methodologies require the teacher's autonomy to create activities with the potential to promote the experience and students' learning (Bacich and Moran, 2018; Moran, 2013). Active methodology encompasses research as a pedagogical principle present by stimulating critical analysis, reflection, investigation, and the proposition of professional and social solutions or alternatives (Institution Pedagogical Proposal).

The research sought to determine whether this manager aims to implement the active methodologies referenced in the Institution's Pedagogical Proposal and attempted to understand how close they are to the teachers, to identify the influence of this manager on their methodological choices.

## **Material and Methods**

A survey was conducted with school managers who work at a private Professional Education Institution, which offers Secondary Level Technical Professional Education. This institution consisted of 53 school units distributed throughout the State of São Paulo.

Bryman (2004) states that combining quantitative and qualitative data is useful for ensuring overlapping results. An online questionnaire was used, prepared using Google Docs, which was sent to them via a link in an invitation email. The managers were not asked to identify themselves. The questionnaire was sent to 53 managers in August 2018.

## Results and Discussion

There were 33 respondents. The analyses of the responses obtained are presented below.

### Training

Out of the 33 respondents, 67% stated that they had completed or were currently completing a postgraduate degree in education, 21% were currently completing or were completing a master's degree in education, 9% had a degree in pedagogy, and 3% chose other courses.

### Motivation and Administrative Mediation for Pedagogical Purposes

Based on what Paro (2015) and Lück (2012) listed, managers chose the priority items in their management (Table 1).

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
1 <sup>st</sup> - Coordinate the collective effort and influence people so that they are motivated; 2 <sup>nd</sup> - Mediate the administrative process to achieve pedagogical goals; 3 <sup>rd</sup> - Achieve the proposed numbers.	24
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**Table 1.** Responses to question 2 of the questionnaire  
(In order of importance, which sequence of actions is most similar to their priorities as school managers - from most important to least important)

*Source: Original research results*

The majority, (73%), chose the option in which their priority is Coordinating collective efforts and influencing people so that they are motivated. Significantly, 97% of managers chose answers in which the first option was coordinating collective efforts and influencing people so that they are motivated. As Lück (2012) describes, one of the great challenges of school management is mobilizing talent, inspire people and efforts in the search for continuous improvement.

When asked whether they agreed with the statement: School managers play a key role in improving school results by influencing teachers' emotions, motivations, skills and the school environment (Question 3), 97% of respondents said yes. These responses confirm the research by Leithwood et al (2010), Pont et al (2008), and the notes by Lück (2012).

In this sense, managers' attitudes can influence the level of engagement and contribute to higher-than-expected participation by employees or lead to high levels of demotivation (Sciotti, 2016).

## Articulate In-Service Training

Next, the manager was asked about his team's in-service training (Table 2).

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
Gather your team to attend a lecture or discuss texts and guidelines, encouraging the search for solutions regarding administrative and educational processes	15
Other	9
Discusses administrative processes as a means to improve the unit's educational indicators	5
Requests that the course coordinators hold meetings with teachers and establishes administrative alignment with sector leaders	4

**Table 2.** Responses to question 4 of the questionnaire  
(To carry out in-service training for your team, you...)

*Source: Original research results*

The presentation or lecture format is still preferred by managers to achieve some in-service training (45%). Only 15% chose the option in which administrative discussion is a means to improve educational indicators. And when they chose the “other” alternative, they said that the actions developed should consider a little of each item mentioned. A minority of managers, 12%, outsource educational discussions to course coordinators.

## Monitoring and Evaluation of the Teaching-Learning Process

When asked whether they monitor and evaluate indicators of the teaching-learning process (Question 5), the majority (85%) stated that they monitor periodically.

Summary of indicators	Quantidade
Dropout/Remaining	17
Failure/Failure in the same Curricular Unit	9
Pass/Approved by recovery	7
Student projects	7
Teaching activity	6
Administrative and Financial	5
Indicator Imprecise or unclear in its definition	5
Student attendance	4
Courses offered	3
Valuing or pedagogical practices	3
Educational records	3
Student evaluation	2
Course evaluation	2
Cancellation	2
Conversations with teams	2
Recovery action	2

**Table 3.** Grouping of keywords resulting from question 5 of the questionnaire  
(If yes, which teaching-learning indicators do you assess and monitor?)

*Source: Original research results*

One manager pointed out that the institution did not define learning indicators (3%). And 12% responded that they do not monitor directly, as the course coordinators and the secretariat carry out the monitoring. Of the majority who confirmed this, the analysis of the keywords resulting from their responses resulted in Table 3, where the repetition of indicators mentioned was counted.

### Principles of Active Methodologies

Still on the teaching and learning process, managers answered question 6, as shown in Table 4.

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
Classes are based on course plans, seeking to solve problems, research and formative assessment	30
The educational process is defined by the course coordinator and his teaching team according to the needs of each course	2
Classes follow course plans, requiring specific assessments of how much the student understood these concepts	1

**Table 4.** Grouping of responses to question 6 of the questionnaire (Regarding the teaching-learning process, which guideline below is closest to your practice?)

*Source: Original research results*

The vast majority (91%) chose the item: Classes are based on course plans, to seek solutions to problems, research, and formative assessment. This choice is in line with the description of the Institution's Pedagogical Proposal. One manager (3%) chose the item: Classes follow course plans, requiring specific assessments of how much the student understood these concepts - a choice that demonstrates that there are doubts about the formative assessment process, which is not specific but rather throughout the process. Two managers (6%) chose the alternative where guidance on the teaching-learning process is delegated to course coordinators.

Similarly, in the following question, when asked: Teachers are hired, guided and developed so that..., (Question 7), 3% chose the option in which hiring teachers is the responsibility of the course coordination team, which hires professionals with technical knowledge (as shown in Table 5). This alternative also exempts the manager from methodological guidance. Most managers (85%) chose the alternative in which the teacher, based on the course plan, proposes activities that allow for problem-solving, investigations, and simulations - also confirming what the Institution's Pedagogical Proposal says and what Diesel et al (2017) described.

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
Based on the course plan, propose activities that allow problem-solving, investigations and simulations	28
Other	3
The hiring and training of teachers is the responsibility of the course coordinators, which hires professionals with technical knowledge recognized by the market	1
Present the content in the curricular units and guide students in preparing a final course project, through theoretical and practical classes	1

**Table 5.** Responses to question 7 of the questionnaire  
(Teachers are hired, guided and developed so that...)

*Source: Original research results*

Regarding monitoring and discussing students' projects (Question 8), a large part of the respondents follow them remotely: 12% watch the final project when they can and 36% learn about them through reports from course coordinators. The majority (52%) chose the option: I participate in some collective planning meetings and discussions of generating themes, as shown in Table 6.

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
I participate in some collective planning meetings and discussions on the themes generated by some classes	17
In pedagogical meetings, course coordinators and teachers share ongoing projects	12
At the end of the course, students present their final projects and, when possible, I attend to them	4

**Table 6.** Responses to question 8 of the questionnaire  
(How do you monitor and discuss the progress of students' projects?)

*Source: Original research results*

When asked: You have identified that, in a certain area, teachers only give presentations and carry out specific assessment activities. Do you believe that some review of this teaching-learning process is necessary? (Question 9), almost all responded that the process should be reassessed.

Another manager responded that he understands the need to review the process and that this is part of his job: to discuss specific cases as well as the development of teaching teams with the coordination team. Because it is a complex issue, there was one response that disagreed in part, saying that it depends on how it happens: if these presentations are part of a process that is shared with the students and these specific assessments are strategies to learn about what cannot be perceived in the day-to-day classroom, there is no need to intervene in the process.

Innovative proposals – which break established standards and institutional rules (Question 10) – are treated as opportunities to carry out administrative mediation to achieve pedagogical goals in 82% of responses (Table 7).

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
They are welcomed and in my role as manager, I provide administrative mediation to achieve the pedagogical purpose	27
They are welcomed, but must be adapted to institutional guidelines	6

**Table 7.** Responses to question 10 of the questionnaire (How are innovative proposals - student projects or teacher suggestions - that break established standards and institutional rules treated?)

*Source: Original research results*

This response is consistent with the principles of active methodologies that Diesel et al (2017) point out and as Paro (2015). On the other hand, 18% understand that innovation must be adapted to institutional rules - an action that can hamper initiatives related to real projects, for example.

In question 11, most managers (64%) can identify how teachers mediate students (Table 8):

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
How teachers mediate students, as I am present at various moments of educational discussions	21
The methodologies used by teachers, as I discuss with course coordinators about the teaching-learning process	11
How the teaching-learning process happen because I attend classes randomly throughout the year	1

**Table 8.** Responses to question 11 of the questionnaire (I can identify...)

*Source: Original research results*

When using active methodologies, teachers must create activities that promote student experience and learning in such a way that they can systematize knowledge (Moran, 2013; Prado, 2003). Thus, in educational discussions, teachers tend to verbalize and express which initiatives are close to active methodologies or not (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2012; Tébar, 2011).

By this verbalization, 33% of the managers understand that this monitoring can happen based on the reports of course coordinators, which may already demonstrate a certain distance from the teachers' actual practices. Only one manager (3%) indicated that he attended classes randomly throughout the year. These responses reinforce the distance observed when asked about how they follow up on students' projects.

### **Role of Research**

In this question, 97% state that research is the resource used in most classes, by groups of students and encouraged by teachers (Table 9).

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
Research is a resource used in most classes, by groups of students and encouraged by teachers	32
Research is used in the integrative project curricular unit, when students need to have arguments and theoretical references for their final course work	1

**Table 9.** Responses to question 12 of the questionnaire  
(How is research used in the courses of this school unit?)  
*Source: Original research results*

Another manager (3%) chose the option: Research is used in the curricular unit of the integrative project when students need to have arguments and theoretical references for the course completion work. Perhaps it was not clear that this option refers to the course completion work, which is not consistent with the proposition defined in the Pedagogical Proposal. The alternative presented in the questionnaire was: The contents are defined by the teachers in the collective planning, so no additional research is requested from the students during the classes. No manager chose it.

### How the Teacher Presents Knowledge

Table 10 shows that 91% reinforced the project as a strategy that is usually chosen by their team to achieve the skills described in the curricular units of technical courses. In the item others, one of the managers (6%) emphasizes that the strategy must look at the uniqueness of the group, which influences the choice of path.

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
Students are invited to discuss and propose projects in response to problems arising from the generating themes	30
Other	2
Teachers present the content during the curricular units, which will be used later in the integrative project, to create a course completion paper	1

**Table 10.** Responses to question 13 of the questionnaire  
(To achieve the skills described in the curricular units of technical courses, which strategy is usually chosen by your team)  
*Source: Original research results*

Only one manager chose the item: teachers present the content during the curricular units, which will be used later in the integrative project, to create a final coursework. We are still talking about a structure where theory precedes practice.

When managers were asked to relate the projects developed by students with the products they generate (Question 14), 52% stated that the projects present solutions for their communities. These responses corroborate what is listed in the Pedagogical Proposal by encouraging critical analysis, reflection, investigation, and the proposition of professional and social solutions or alternatives. When choosing the item: they relate to the concepts of the course plans and the students are ready to look for a job (45%), perhaps it demonstrates that, despite the project, it does not work with real cases or with the students' communities. In this



item, only one manager did not want to give an opinion on the students' projects, delegating them to the course coordinators. The data are presented in Table 11:

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
They present solutions to problems in the communities where these students live	17
They relate to the concepts in the course plans and students are ready to look for jobs when the course ends	15
Course coordinators guide teachers directly on the projects that students develop	1

**Table 11.** Responses to question 14 of the questionnaire  
(In your assessment, the projects developed by the students...)

*Source: Original research results*

When asked about the objective of pedagogical meetings (Table 12), 82% of them chose the alternative where the intention is to promote discussion between teachers and coordinators about the teaching and learning process.

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
Promote discussion among teachers and course coordinators about the teaching-learning process and exchange between those involved, about pedagogical experiences	27
Another possibility	5
Provide the presentation of educational concepts or institutional projects	1

**Table 12.** Responses to question 15 of the questionnaire (Pedagogical meetings are held to...)

*Source: Original research results*

To find out whether students have the opportunity to understand concepts in diverse contexts (Libâneo, 2011), they were asked whether the manager would be able to say whether teachers present knowledge in new or different situations. As shown in Table 13, the majority of responses are concentrated on yes (45%) and sometimes (30% of responses). Only 9% responded in some cases. And 6% chose the option not sure and 6% opted for other. This data may show that they look at teaching processes from a certain distance: the teacher who only attempts to transmit content by lecturing does not enable the student to understand the concepts in other ways. Also, this teacher does not identify what representations the student has about the concepts in order to act on them by introducing the necessary variation between the materials and the project, so that a new representation can be developed (Meirieu, 1998; Libâneo, 2011).

Response Possibilities	Number of respondents
Yes	15
Sometimes	10
In some cases	3
Other	2
Not sure	2
In some courses	1

**Table 13.** Responses to question 16 of the questionnaire  
(Do teachers present knowledge in new or different situations, inside or outside the classroom?)

*Source: Original survey results*

### Role of Error

The managers chose the option that best represented the role of error in the school under their administration (Table 14).

Response possibilities	Number of respondents
They provide information for teachers to review their classes	14
They are part of the project development process and the course completion work	12
They are identified at specific moments during the formative and individual assessment process and in the course completion work	7

**Table 14.** Responses to question 17 of the questionnaire (In this school, students' mistakes...)

*Source: Original research results*

As the option chosen by the majority (43%), the error shows teachers which strategies should be reviewed. Once again, when exposed to the term course completion work, managers understood that completion work is part of the ongoing assessment process. Thus, 36% chose the second item, even though it contradicts the process of developing a project. The third item, also chosen by 21% of respondents, brings other divergences, as it mentions specific moments - which is contrary to ongoing education.

### Assessment

The next question asked managers to write down how they would resolve the following issue: You received an email with a complaint from a student who reported that she was absent on the day of the test and had failed. What would you orient to responding to this complaint?

In most of the responses, the managers want to understand whether the student failed the test because of only one assessment and understand that it is important to review the entire process. Some of these respondents, in addition also want to understand whether the student was already having problems developing the skills required by the course – which appears in their speech as giving a new chance if there is one. For another five managers, the solution is to forward the student to request a new assessment, justifying the reason for her absence. Or even that the student should request a review or recovery of learning. In these two statements and three others that treat the student's question as part of an administrative process, the

manager does not seek to talk to the coordinators and teachers. And so, he advises the student to request a new test. Thus, the chance of the student having her failure maintained seems to be high. Table 15 below summarizes:

Action suggested by the manager	Number of respondents
Review the process	14
Check how the process happened and give her another chance, if necessary	6
The student should request a new test	5
I ask the course coordinator to review the process together with the teachers	4
The student should have another chance	1
Listen to the teachers	1
Review the process and give the student another chance	1
Review the process, even if the reason for the absence is trivial	1

**Table 15.** Summary of the managers' speech when a student reports that she was absent on the day of the test and had failed.

*Source: Original research results*

In four other responses, the manager forwards the matter to the coordination department to resolve with the teachers. One of the managers believes that a review of the evaluation process is necessary, even if the reason for the absence is trivial.

Although the discussion revolves around the review of the process, no comment mentioned any other type of evaluation.

### **Application Formats for Active Methodologies**

As a final question, the manager was asked whether training the team in active methodologies would favor application according to the modality, as shown in Table 16. The majority (88%) chose that it is possible to apply it in short-term (free) courses, technical courses, and at events.

Three managers, or 9%, chose the option in which it is only possible to apply it in integrative projects and one manager (3%) chose the option in which there was no possibility of evaluation because he is developing teachers for this practice.

Response possibilities	Number of respondents
Application in all courses: free, technical and even in events	29
The application of these methodologies in integrative projects	3
I can't evaluate it yet, because we are developing teachers for this practice	1

**Table 16.** Responses to question 19 of the questionnaire  
(Team training in active methodologies and student-centered learning strategies favors)

*Source: Original research results*

### **Conclusions**

The study conducted with 33 managers of a vocational education institution in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, shows that they are concerned with motivating their team, mediating the

administrative work for pedagogical purposes, and identifying, in the alternatives presented in the questionnaire, actions that are significant for the implementation of active methodologies in the classroom. Although their choices in the questionnaire options indicated that they seek to implement active methodologies, when questioned openly about this action and monitoring, it was noted that some of them are not too close to the classroom and do not know in detail how the pedagogical practice of the teacher takes place. In approximately one-third of the cases, the work of these teachers is not guided by the manager directly, but by the coordination team of these school units and some managers understand that it is not their role to guide the teacher.

As a suggestion for the Institution to advance in the implementation of these methodologies, it could describe what is expected of this manager to highlight which activities are related to their role; organize indicators of the learning process and carry out periodic evaluations of these indicators for discussion among managers to seek improvements. It is also recommended to assess whether the hierarchical organization of these school units - in which the manager is responsible for both pedagogical and administrative tasks - facilitates this closeness with teachers. And whether this dual role causes an overload in their priorities. There are other school models where there is a division of labor between the administrative principal and the pedagogical principal. As a further study, it would be interesting to compare whether principals who work under this division can be closer to the educational process and the methodological choices of teachers.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my parents, my husband and my son for their full support in my student life. Senac São Paulo, where I work for 24 years and the managers that answer the research. Also, for University of São Paulo/ESALQ and Professor Marco Canto for providing the orientation for this research.

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