


Collaborative management in schools: Experiences on the role of Ibero-American Networks in Health Education

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ABSTRACT

Health education is complex and, in schools, involves not only specific teams, but also management, organizational climate, and curricula. In this context, we understand collaborative management as a model in which school leaders promote the involvement of the school community, are based on open communication processes, and are receptive to innovation. Networking, enhanced by digital technologies, is one of the resources of these collaborative practices in the management of schools that, at the same time, reinforce them. Following a methodological strategy of an exploratory and qualitative nature, we analyze in a comparative perspective the public policies that frame health education in schools. The focus is on two experiences carried out in a network, in Brazil and Portugal. The results allow us to (re)think health education strategies in the school context, based on collaborative management strategies and cooperation networks.

Keywords: Health promotion and education, Collaborative management and leadership, Competencies of health education professionals, Networking

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INTRODUCTION

School management is a crucial field of action for Education, as stated by Lück (2009, p.23):

[...] school management is responsible for planning, organizing, leading, guiding, mediating, coordinating and evaluating the processes necessary for the promotion of educational actions aimed at the learning and training of students in order to make them capable of adequately facing the challenges of the globalized society and the knowledge-centered economy (Lück, 2009, p.23).

In this sense, it is evident that school management is intended to carry out the organization, mobilization and articulation of all the material and human conditions necessary to ensure the advancement of socio-educational processes, oriented towards the effective promotion of learning. In other words, the purpose of management is to create conditions for the learning of students in a given school institution to take place, and can go beyond ordinary pedagogical issues.

Thus, we can say that school management encompasses a set of norms, guidelines, actions, procedures and structure whose main objective is pedagogical, in which political and social learning is not discarded. This understanding converges with what Luck (2009, p. 24) states when he mentions the existing relationships in school management, which involves "people management, pedagogical management, school culture management and management of the school's daily life, aiming at the student's education, and all these factors are interrelated". The understanding of management from this perspective goes beyond merely administrative aspects and involves aspects related to autonomy, transparency, participation and, consequently, decision-making processes.

In fact, the idea of participation is related to the democratic process itself, as a means to make its realization viable. In other words, there is no democracy without participation, without mutual collaboration. In this way, we use collaborative management as equivalent to democratic management, since both arouse the motivation for the participation of the social actors that make up the school, seeking more horizontal relationships, with a view to equality in relationships and a decentralized and articulation model.

Thus, the democratization of Education indicates a need for the educational process to constitute a space for the development of the true exercise of democracy where actions need to be aimed beyond the expansion of school attendance. Democratization, the decision-making space that the school holds, only makes sense if it fulfills its function, which is to ensure social inclusion. All this explicit context that raises and highlights democratic management, collaboration and autonomy rectifies the need to propose educational public policies, which are concretized and made visible through the implementation of specific programs, actions and projects, such as those reported here.

Considering the elaboration and execution of intervention projects, in an intersectoral way, in education and health, it is worth noting that the network experiences had their approaches in



preventive policies that defend an objective and contextualized analysis and adequate to sociocultural diversities.

We will deal specifically with health education in schools, a theme that involves management, but also diverse professionals who make up a collaborative network (Harvey, Neff, Knight, Mukherjee, Tittle, Jain, Carrasco, Bernal-Serrano, Goronga and Holmes, 2022). In this context, we understand collaborative management as a model in which school leaders promote the involvement of the school community, based on open communication processes, receptive to innovation. Networking, enhanced by digital technologies, is one of the resources of these collaborative practices in school management.

Thus, this article is based on the understanding that collaborative management is based on and sustains the networks of Ibero-American experiences that we analyze here. Following a methodological strategy of an exploratory and qualitative nature, we analyze, from a comparative perspective, the public policies that frame health education in schools. In this way, we describe and analyze two experiments carried out in a network. One of these, developed by the Interdisciplinary Research Group on Representations, Education and Sustainability (GIPRES), of the State University of Bahia (UNEB) and is part of the Research Line on Social Representations and the Organization of School Space. In this sense, we privilege socio-educational practices and public educational policies to elaborate the intervention project in school health and safety, in a school of the Municipal Education Network of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, through the preventive approach and the health education model that underpins the School Health Promotion Program. The other, aimed at schools in the ten municipalities that make up the Intermunicipal Community of the Region of Leiria, Portugal, involving the Open University in Portugal and the EDEX Foundation in Spain.

EXPERIENCE IN SALVADOR/BAHIA/BRAZIL

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

The Álvaro da Franca Rocha Municipal School (EMAFR), founded on 08/03/1960, is a Public Institution, part of the Cabula Regional Management. Created by Decree No. 9928/92, published in the Official Gazette of 12/29/1992, the school unit is a medium-sized school that has a physical structure that has 5 classrooms that work in the morning and afternoon shifts, has 1 secretariat, 1 kitchen, 1 covered patio, 2 bathrooms for students and 1 for teachers and 1 improvised coordination room. As for the teachers, there are 14 in total and most of them are pedagogues by training and there are also specialists in the areas of English language, physical education and fine arts. Pedagogical resources, materials and equipment are available for the teacher to carry out research and planning.

In 2022, the School offered classes from the 1st to the 5th year of schooling, with a total of 253 students in the two shifts of operation. The predominant age group of the students is from 6 to 14 years old and they are mostly from the neighborhood itself, but there are also children and young people from adjacent neighborhoods. These students are the children of people who work as street vendors, cleaners, street vendors, maids, bricklayers, vendors, among others. And, the school's IDEB in 2022 was 5.4, reaching the projected target for the period. Regarding the pass, fail and dropout rates for the year 2022, they were, respectively: 96%, 4% and we had no dropout.

Therefore, this school unit serves students in the early years of elementary school, especially from the community of Engomadeira (Figure 1), where most families are close to drugs, such as alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and even cocaine. Many parents, uncles, neighbors, older siblings of children and young people are involved in trafficking.

In the specific situation of alcohol use, it is possible to perceive in this school unit inserted in a neighborhood that, in some cases, alcoholic mothers neglect their children and put the team, to a certain extent, impelled to think of strategies that allow the development of preventive actions such as lectures, conversations with families in meetings, referrals to Psychologists and Social Workers.

Figure 1: School location map



Source: Santos (2019).

In view of the above, we conclude that this is a neighborhood of popular origin, disorderly urbanized, with a majority of economically disadvantaged residents who suffer from poverty, unemployment, violence, and drugs. These themes, according to Garrido (2021), among others, have mobilized the school as part of contemporary social issues. Therefore, we understand that in the process that involves management, climate and school organization and curricula, they are challenges



and perspectives for school health and safety. Thus, allied with the thought of Freire (1980), BOMFIM, CORREIA and AZEVEDO (2023) state that:

[...] the management process does not only go through the path of administering, but also enables development thought of as a process of critical awareness of reality, which implies the act of establishing a transformative and liberating praxis (Bomfim, Correia and Azevedo, 2023, p.3).

These elements translate the existing social inequality, but it is the experiences and relationships established by its inhabitants, on a daily basis, that make the neighborhood a space beyond the physical conception, enabling the valorization of the place and the construction of bonds of belonging, between the community and the school.

EMAFR is well regarded by the Engomadeira community, especially for the pedagogical work it develops, with the direct participation of the community in the actions of the Institution. We emphasize that the relationship between school and community is in line with the meaning of the expression "school in partnership", which reveals a passage from the bureaucratic logic to a logic of partnership based on negotiation between social actors in order to suggest more horizontal relations (Alves and Varela, 2012).

We understand that the definition of values, mission and vision of the future integrates the perspective of collaborative and participatory management, reflecting the common goal of those who make up the school. EMAFR's values are inspired by article 3 of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB 9394/96): excellence, as we seek to offer quality education to the community; creativity and innovation, as we encourage different ways to solve existing pedagogical and organizational challenges; pluralism of ideas and respect for human dignity; participation, through collaborative work; equality, with learning opportunities for all students, observing their specificities; transparency in the application and accountability of public resources, as well as in the actions carried out with the community, especially the community and other public bodies representing Education in the municipality of Salvador/BA. It is in this context that we achieve an insertion and good coexistence with the neighborhood community, thus facilitating the realization of pedagogical proposals, including intervention, described below.

THE INTERVENTION CARRIED OUT: HEALTH AND SAFETY AT SCHOOL

For the construction of this intervention proposal, we initially proceeded to the contextualization that evidences aspects of the educational reality from data collected in school documents such as Regiment, Pedagogical Political Project, among others. In addition to identifying the internal and external Social Network of the School, as well as the protection and risk factors identified in the school context.



Regarding the School's Social Network, we identified internal and external elements. In the first case, we effectively identified as partners: the school management, the educators, employees, the students themselves, the School Council and the Education Agent, an intern in the pedagogy area, responsible for carrying out actions in the school and assisting in the control of students' attendance, contacting them whenever a student is identified as absent. In the case of external elements, potential partners to present the school's proposal and mobilize them to participate, the following were identified: CRAS, NGOs and Social Projects, Medical Center and Guardianship Council - Institutions that carry out joint work, but that need to be intensified and strengthened with a view to preventive work.

Regarding the protective and risk factors identified in the school unit, we can highlight the following as protective strengths: 1) Existence of positive bonds between the school and the community; 2) Partnership and willingness of Faculty and Staff to carry out pedagogical activities with families and students; 3) Articulation of the pedagogical proposal with independent and local issues; 4) Clear definition of rules and boundaries within the school; 5) Confidence in the school's work; 6) Strong affective bonds and mutual respect between the community in general, family, students, teachers and staff; 7) Existence of cultural institutions in the neighborhood that work in partnership with the school and, 8) Inclusive attitude of the school. As weak or risk points, we had: 1) Location in an area of vulnerability; 2) Family members involved in drug trafficking; 3) Fragile partnership with some social facilities in the neighborhood; 4) Neighborhood and residents stigmatized as violent and, 5) Interference of extracurricular issues, especially of coexistence in the neighborhood, within the school.

Therefore, taking the School's annual Action Plan as contextualization, the intervention proposal aimed to develop strategies for the prevention of drug use with the training of multipliers, aiming to reduce the existing risk factors. To this end, it was supported in three axes (Integration of prevention in the school curriculum, youth participation and the training of multipliers, and strengthening of the school in and with the community), in order to develop actions with the development of social actors.

Taking this purpose as a guide, in a meeting with the pedagogical team - coordination and teachers. The meeting began with a collective discussion on the need to address the issue at school, from a preventive perspective. The group came to an understanding of a proposal for the theme of the Fair since the work on citizenship and human rights was already agreed, with the theme "Social Policies and Citizenship: what do we need to live well?". The idea was that the proposal would have the participation of the entire school community: family members, students, teachers, employees, coordination and management of the school, in addition to inserting the local community of the Engomadeira neighborhood.



At the end of the alignment meeting, we had suggestions for articulated themes to work on with the classes, namely: children's rights and duties; public health policies; social movements and democracy; women's and older people's rights; education; the neighborhood, the community, and social welfare; citizenship on social media (Bomfim, Correia and Azevedo, 2023). This moment corresponded to *Stage 1 - Integration of prevention into the school curriculum*. With these definitions collectively made, we move on to the next stage of the intervention.

Stage 2 - Implementing preventive actions – from theory to practice, we seek to encourage youth protagonism through the creation of discussion groups in the classroom. In this way, we started the actions related to youth participation and the training of multipliers. The teachers used different methodologies and the use of texts, videos, interviews with local residents, among others, which were constantly shared in the group, in the planning meetings. The neighborhood and the local community were portrayed beyond the stigma of the periphery, expanding the students' understanding of the neighborhood, by highlighting its positive aspects, such as the existing collectives, the institutions and people with representation in the community. The idea was to avoid the stigma of the neighborhood, as violent, peripheral, where drug trafficking is highlighted. We went the other way, talking about the history of the neighborhood, about its positive points, we brought older people to tell how the neighborhood was like, making a comparison of how it is now and why, in a critical way, etc. We also address the issue of citizenship on social networks, the risks, how to proceed in a conversation with strangers, *fake news*, social media rules, among others.

It was an intense period of work that culminated with an event open to the community, exhibition of the works, artistic presentations, among others. These actions were related to *Stage 3 - strengthening the school in the community and with the community*, expressing the specific objective of the intervention proposal, which was to hold a Cultural Fair as a culmination of the intervention project based on the productions made with the classes.

As stated by Bomfim, Correia, and Azevedo (2023), the intervention project presents achievements, challenges, solutions, and perspectives at five levels – personal, professional, group, institutional, and community, considering the perspective of collaborative management as a factor in promoting health and safety at school, as evidenced in Chart 1, below:



Table 1: Achievements, challenges and perspectives of the intervention

Levels	Conquestas	Challenges	Perspectives
Staff	Learning, knowledge and overcoming misconceptions.	Overcoming prejudices in relation to unknown issues.	Dissemination of the proposal/experience in other environments.
Professional	Learning, knowledge and overcoming misconceptions.	Lack of more in-depth knowledge of the subject.	Disseminate the knowledge and experience acquired.
Group	Study of the theme.	Collective adhesion to the proposal and insertion of actions in the School's work proposal.	Use of researched material such as texts and videos.
Institutional	Collective expansion of the intervention proposal.	Insertion of the proposal in the School's PPP.	Insertion of more consistent actions for work in later years.
Communal	First approach made on the subject in the history of the school.	Approaching the topic in an uncondusive environment.	Address issues preventively and involve the local community.

Source: adapted from Bomfim, Correia and Azevedo (2023, p. 13).

In this way, we become multipliers of the proposal within the school. We feel that what has been done can be improved, expanded, with the participation of the entire school community, in a more effective way in the year 2020. Therefore, we sought to include the proposal in the school's annual plan.

EXPERIENCE IN PORTUGAL

CHARACTERIZATION

Health education is complex and, in schools, involves not only specific teams, but also management, organizational climate, and curricula (Harvey, Neff, Knight, Mukherjee, Tittle, Jain, Carrasco, Bernal-Serrano, Goronga, and Holmes, 2022). In this context, collaborative management adopts a model in which school leaders promote the involvement of the school community, are based on open communication processes, and are receptive to innovation (Zukowsky-Tavares, Marinho, Aguiar, and Rossit, 2022). Networking, enhanced by digital technologies, is one of the resources of these collaborative practices in the management of schools that, at the same time, reinforce them.

In the experience described here, the Intermunicipal Community of the Region of Leiriaⁱ (CIMRL) within the scope of its competences provided a training action for applicators of the "The Adventure of Life" program. This training action resulted from a collaboration network established between the Intermunicipal Community of the Region of Leiria, Fundación Edex (from Bilbao, Spain, which designed and developed the program and the Open University (UAb), the only Portuguese public university of digital education. "The Adventure of Life" is a health education program in a school context, based on the development of personal and social skills and the promotion of healthy lifestyle habits (EDEX, 2010). The program consists of 2 fundamental axesⁱⁱ:



- Thematic axis, focused on the health habits that the program proposes to address – activity and rest, alcohol, tobacco, medicines, hygiene and safety.
- Cross-sectional axis, related to the life skills that the program seeks to develop - self-respect, facing challenges, managing tension, relating and making decisions.

It is aimed at children between 8 and 11 years old and provides for the involvement of teachers, families and the community in the proposed activities with the students. It consists of a set of animated video stories, booklet and respective stickers, materials that have been translated into Portuguese and adapted to the context of application and intervention by a team of specialists.

Given the geographical dispersion of teachers and technicians in the municipalities, offering the training action in a network digital education regime seemed to be the most appropriate. The action was then designed based on the Virtual Pedagogical Model of the Open® University based on four fundamental pillars: student centrality, in which students play an active role in the construction of their knowledge process; flexibility, based on a predominantly asynchronous communication model; diversified interaction not only with teachers, but also with resources and among the students themselves, constituting learning communities; digital inclusion, to the extent that immersion in the digital environment in learning activities promotes the development of digital skills and, thus, digital inclusion (Mendes, Bastos, Amante, Aires, Cardoso and Loureiro, 2018).

INTERVENTION

The training action for applicators of the A Aventura da Vida program had 3 editions, one attended consistently by 12 municipal technicians, the second and third attended consistently by 12 and 7 teachers of the 1st cycle of basic education (CEB) respectivelyⁱⁱⁱ. A period of online acclimatization preceded the formal start of the activities, with the aim of promoting in the participants the familiarity with the virtual learning environment, the integration of some netiquette norms and also the interaction between the participants, favoring the construction of a sense of community. This strategy is common at UAb, where the attendance of the online onboarding module precedes the start of any course, formal or non-formal, in a mandatory and free way and has been demonstrating widespread effectiveness. In particular, in reducing adaptation difficulties and drop-out rates.

The training action for Aventura da Vida applicators was organized around three major themes that took place over seven weeks.

- The first theme, *Transversal Skills*, aimed to promote knowledge about Life Skills. In this sense, support resources were made available and a discussion was promoted based on Life Skills, around the following questions: what are they? How do they come about? What are they for? How can they be taught and learned in the classroom? This activity



allowed the participants to mobilize knowledge, but also to share experiences from their professional and, occasionally, personal experience.

- The second theme focused on *Healthy Lifestyle Habits*, having provided the first contact with the program, its nature, application methodology and the ways in which it can be explored in a concrete intervention. In this sense, the design of an activity involving the family and mobilizing resources from the community was proposed. As much as possible, this activity should be articulated with the curricular and disciplinary development of the class.
- The third, *The Adventure of Life*, focused on one of the 12 themes (self-respect, facing challenges, managing tension, relating, making decisions, medication use, alcohol consumption, tobacco consumption, activity and rest, food, safety and hygiene), as well as the necessary interaction with other elements of socialization, such as family and community, for example. In this sense, the participants were challenged to explore the potentialities between the program and reality (school, family, community) in the planning of an activity to be effectively applied. This planning was guided by the following aspects: theme, objectives and relationship with the school curriculum, methodology and strategies, resources and materials, schedule, evaluation.

The following table summarizes the result of the strategies planned and developed by the applicators integrated in the training actions.

Table 2: Themes, strategies and evaluation

Themes	Strategies	Evaluation
Oral hygiene; Healthy eating; Protection of the environment; Physical activity and rest; Interpersonal relationships and conflict management; Safety rules; Respect for oneself and self-concept; Family diversity; Decision-making processes.	Articulation with the curricular contents (e.g. study of the environment, written expression, oral communication, calculation and graphic representation, expressions); Family Collaboration Integration into the community; Participation of other agents (e.g. health, NGOs, security forces, companies).	Observation logs; Peer review; Bar charts; Questionnaire surveys; Jobs done/products.

Source: The Authors (2023).

The results of the activities thus developed were diverse. They went through research work, plastic and written expression, and oral presentation. But also interaction with community structures. By way of illustration, we can refer to the promotion of a healthy diet through the introduction of



fruits in the children's snacks, which required the involvement of families. The realization of works of plastic and artistic expression of representation of emotions that was later exhibited in an exhibition open to the community. The call for external entities for the development of road education activities. Outlets for cleaning common areas through garbage collection and separation. Parallel to these activities, which mobilized more agents, others took place with more restricted purposes, more focused on the class group. As an illustration, we can mention the case of a class with high levels of interpersonal conflict and with which more focused activities were developed. For example, the challenge of identifying and presenting the qualities of colleagues. This activity was developed in the class space and was the motto for others that, together, allowed to improve the quality of interaction, communication, identification and expression of emotions, with reflections on the reduction of conflicts.

Both the planning and the application were shared and monitored during the training action, which resulted in very enriching moments for all involved. In particular, by presenting the activities and strategies developed and their results, other teachers benefited from this sharing as possibilities to be implemented in their own contexts and classes. This collaborative dynamic between peers is, therefore, relevant at several levels: in the professional development of teachers, in the reinforcement of the teacher's leadership role, in the innovation of teaching practice and in the quality of student learning (Alves, Macedo, Madaleno, Martins and Martins, 2022).

This idea of teacher leadership refers to a profile of adaptation, communication, critical reflection and questioning. Such a profile requires a posture of constant learning, throughout life and throughout the life cycle (Massano and Henriques, 2018). Hence, the importance of the training action under analysis here is reinforced.

The space of the action became available after the formal end of the action, allowing the continuity of sharing, in a logic of a virtual community of practice (Wenger, Mcdermott and Snyder, 2002). As organic entities, communities of practice need to evolve dynamically. Part of this evolution is the reinforcement of the integration of the A Aventura da Vida program in the formal curriculum and throughout the school year. This results in the development of life skills and a real promotion of health in schools.

The dynamics described here have been enhanced by digital technologies. The fact that the training action is offered in digital and networked education, allowed it to be attended without physical, geographical or schedule constraints. The applicators benefited from a flexibility that made it easier for them to reconcile professional demands and the dynamics of family and personal life with study. At the same time, it requires an effort, organization and management of time and autonomy of work. In this sense, the community has also organized itself in a digital environment. We speak, therefore, of a virtual community of practice to the extent that all interaction and sharing



takes place in a virtual environment, thus allowing these teachers to keep in touch, share doubts and difficulties, experiences and challenges. Collaborative work does not end with the end of the training action, because The Adventure of Life is not a recipe for a single application, it is a basis to be experimented and developed in each context, in each class, in each school year.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Both shared experiences reaffirm the need for (cor)relations of forces exerted on objects arising from reality that link the relevance of what is lived, conceived and perceived (Garrido, 2019) and articulated in an intersectoral way with Education and Health. This implies research developed, in a solidary and collaborative way, in search of challenges, solutions and perspectives that require collaborative management as a factor in promoting health and safety at school. These experiences developed through intervention and shared projects also reinforce the idea that management and collaborative leadership in the school context are effective at various levels, as had already been evidenced in previous studies (e.g., Zukowsky-Tavares, Marinho, Aguiar, and Rossit; 2023).

First, in promoting the professional development of teachers who feel motivated and supported in the frequency of training actions. At the same time, in stimulating and supporting pedagogical innovation, practices and strategies in the classroom and others that go beyond the walls of the school. Namely, those that call for the involvement of the family and the approximation, or even intervention, of the community. These practices also have an impact on the quality of learning (Alves, Macedo, Madaleno, Martins and Martins, 2022).

The collaborative networking that underpinned each of the experiences described and discussed in this article allows us to (re)think health education strategies in the school context, within the framework of collaborative management or leadership. Collaborative leadership makes it possible to frame, in this way, the responses to the challenges that arise in the face of a new culture of continuous learning, in context, and focused on professional development and the improvement of educational quality.

The performance of management and collaborative leadership addressed in this study implies the various levels of school organization. On the one hand, there is the exercise of top-level and/or intermediate coordination that supports (or at least does not block) initiatives that go beyond those envisaged within the school organisation itself. On the other hand, the exercise of the margins of autonomy and initiative on the part of teachers to promote the improvement and innovation of their practices. At any of these levels of leadership, the importance of a culture of collaboration is evidenced in the promotion of joint questioning and reflection, the sharing of relevant scientific-pedagogical and management practices, the shared development of diversified materials, strategies



and methodologies, creative problem solving, support in decision-making processes, etc. (Alves, Macedo, Madanelo, Martins and Martins, 2022).

We also highlight, at this stage, that the analysis presented allows us to highlight the importance of the relationships established and, at times, strengthened with the surrounding community. This notion of community includes the students' families, but goes beyond that, also integrating other agents and structures such as local personalities, non-governmental or cultural organizations or public entities (such as the security forces or local authorities). The diversity of groups, resources and actors mobilized by the school reveal changes in the administration and management models of schools, as well as the need to ensure and promote more innovative, integrated and meaningful activities for students.

In summary, the experiences presented in this article configure, in global terms, logics of opening the school to the community, multilevel collaboration within the school organization, dynamization of extended networks that enhance development and innovation. Therefore, it is pertinent, in our view, to promote a deeper understanding of these dynamics. Based on the results presented, the following axes are identified to be developed in future research: i) collaborative leadership and management in a network; ii) collaboration, involvement and participation of the school community; iii) integration of health education into the school curriculum; iv) strengthening health education from a community perspective.



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¹ An association of municipalities (the Portuguese administrative division equivalent to the prefecture in Brazil)



composed of 10 municipalities - Alvaiázere, Ansião, Batalha, Castanheira de Pera, Figueiró dos Vinhos, Leiria, Marinha Grande, Pedrógão Grande, Pombal and Porto de Mós. This is a measure that aims to address the trend of decentralization of competences, especially in the areas of education and health.

²<https://www.edex.es/portfolio/la-aventura-de-la-vida/>.

³ In the education system, Portuguese corresponds to the first 4 years of schooling, approaching elementary school in the Brazilian education system.