



Original Article

The culture of results and new public management: the power narratives in the “School Transformation” award

Cultura de resultados e nova gestão pública: as narrativas de poder no prêmio “Escola Transformação”

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Abstract

Objective: to analyze the power narratives expressed in a public educational policy in the State of Minas Gerais, entitled “Escola Transformação” Award, in the direction to reveal the presence power dynamics and the interests of policy makers in cultural change. **Materials and Methods:** a qualitative-interpretative research was carried out, with secondary data studied by the methods of document analysis and Foucault’s discourse analysis. **Results:** the Award’s statement and its discursive formations are presented, which evidenced the massively accounting understanding of the educational activity, the imposition of a results culture, like this the asymmetrical power connection between the state government and schools. **Conclusion:** the cultural definitions of how the school should be organized, understood and evaluated are given through this asymmetrical power relationship, and which, through a political action called pacifying awards, sought to expand and legitimize a results culture and New Public Management discourse in schools.

Keywords: Results culture. Education. Public policy. New public management.

Resumo

Objetivo: analisar as narrativas de poder expressas em uma política pública educacional do Estado de Minas Gerais, intitulada Prêmio “Escola Transformação”, de modo a desvendar a dinâmica de poder existente e os interesses dos formuladores de política na mudança cultural. **Materiais e Métodos:** foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa-interpretativa, com dados secundários estudados pelos métodos de análise documental e de análise do discurso foucaultiana. **Resultados:** são apresentados o enunciado do Prêmio e suas formações discursivas, que evidenciaram o entendimento maciçamente contábil da atividade educacional, a imposição de uma cultura de resultados, bem como a relação de poder assimétrica entre o governo estadual e as escolas. **Conclusão:** as definições culturais de como a escola deve ser organizada, compreendida e avaliada se dão por meio dessa relação de poder assimétrica, e que por meio de uma ação política, dita pacificadora de premiação, buscaram expandir e legitimar uma cultura de resultados e o discurso da Nova Gestão Pública nas escolas.

Palavras-chave: Cultura de resultados. Educação. Políticas públicas. Nova gestão pública.

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Introduction

Organizational culture is significant to understand the life of an organization, and is an “umbrella” concept of a form of thought that is interested in cultural and symbolic phenomena¹. Therefore, culture is where symbols and meanings are publicly expressed¹, such as material objects, policies, and their narratives.

In understanding narratives as an action², they present themselves as tools to make sense of organizational situations and increase organizational legitimacy^{3,4}. In this process of legitimation, the use of culture, its artifacts and its narratives, for the purpose of coordination, control and symbolic manipulation are, for Wood Jr.⁵, a throwback to organizations – these would understand organizational culture as something to be managed and developed to provide them with better performance.

And in this setback, returning to the point that organizational culture is expressed in narratives, the understanding of narratives in a policy at its base can contribute to unveil the existing power dynamics, culture and meanings expressed in them, as well as the interests of those who promulgate this policy, and the intentional contribution to the creation or change of a previous organizational culture⁶.

In this context, symbols are considered as instruments of domination and ideological control in the interest of those in power⁶. Likewise, politics is considered one of the most complex sectors of society and has a discourse far from configuring a place in which it is pacified, but as a place that it performs, favorably, some of its most fearful powers – in which it reveals its connection with power and with the desire to seize power⁷.

Also based on Foucault, Dardot and Laval⁸ point to the existence of a dominant class guided by neoliberal principles, with a greater mobilization in the political field of education, and with the interest of implementing an influential normative system worldwide, of mercantilist logic and aimed at the reform of the State.

According to Marques⁹, the process of reforming the state, aiming to meet this demand of the economic crisis in Brazil in the 1970s – obeying the rules of capitalism and in response to external pressures received by the State – was called as *Nova Gestão Pública* (NGP – New Public Management, in English). Thus, NGP is also conceived as a process of reform of the public sector, based on elements and management tools of companies, and which aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of state services in modern societies¹⁰.

In this sense, in the intellectual and political project of neoliberalism, with a new management of the public sector, the massively accounting^a understanding of educational activity, as well as other activities - via a rationality imported from the mercantile world - would bring the “culture of results” to educational public policies, which, according to Dardot and Laval⁸, have “distrust as a principle and evaluative surveillance as a method”.

Thus, as part of an intellectual and political project of ngp in the State of Minas Gerais, the “Transformation School” Award was established in March 2021, through Resolution n. 4524, which, according to SEE¹¹, would be allocated to state public schools that presented “prominence in the results of performance and school flow”. As one of the actions of public educational policy implemented in the state in the administration of the government of Romeo Zema^b, the award was instituted aiming to publicly legitimize procedures and prosperous experiences of schools to improve the quality of education¹¹. This discourse raised questions about its pacifying nature, presented as an award, but specifically marked by a discourse imbued with the culture of results and the exercise of power of the state government.

Thus, due to the greater mobilization of the culture of results in the political field of education and the characteristics of his discourse, and in association with the one indicated by Boyce⁶, the analyses of Foucault⁷ and Dardot and Laval⁸, this article aimed to analyze the power narratives of political action Award “Transformation School”. Due to its characteristics, understanding the narratives contributed to unveil the existing power dynamics, culture and meanings expressed in it, as well as the interests of its formulators in the process of cultural transformation of education, directed to results and NGP. In addition, it can also contribute to the analysis of other public policies, in the same process of understanding their narratives and the interests of their formulators.

The culture of results and the new public management in education

In the understanding of organizational culture as a set of cultural and symbolic phenomena¹, organizational symbolism involves the construction of meaning and its material annexation, starting

^a The massively accounting term is presented by Dardot and Laval⁸ because they consider that market logic extends far beyond the strict market boundaries, producing a generalization of the evaluation methods in public education derived from the company.

^b Governor Romeo Zema took office of the Government of the State of Minas Gerais on January 1, 2019, affiliated to the New Party, and which had as some of its government proposals to provide an environment of greater economic freedom, the reform of the state to face bureaucracy and privileges, and the creation of a culture of knowledge management¹³.

from an ideological domain with the use of language^{1,6,12}, in the formulation of narratives, as well as in the implementation of policies.

According to Dardot and Laval⁸, in a “culture of results”, the policies instituted in neoliberal logic bring management and performance to the public administration and aim to “maximize the usefulness of the population”, through the “massively accounting understanding of judicial, medical, social, cultural, educational or police activity”, and through constant performance management. This rationality imported from the economic generates the determination of performance indicators and a generalized evaluation logic, which aims at the control of public agents and the optimization of their results⁸. And due to the expressive effect of NGP, the culture of results is adopted in educational policies as a new organizational culture⁹.

The NGP, according to Marques¹⁰, can be called a “state reform movement, whose objective was to respond to the economic crisis of the 1970s, within the framework of capitalist regulation”, and in response to external pressures received by the State. And in addition, considered as a reformer process of public services based on the business management model¹⁰.

In the context of NGP, governments are responsible for conducting policies as tools for adjusting society in order to change the conception of the individual – now the company man or the entrepreneurial man – making the entrepreneurial way of life the priority of education⁷.

Still in NGP, instead of a direct provision of services, the State is expected to strengthen its role as regulator, evaluator and distributor of incentives for autonomous providers of public services¹⁴. According to Verger and Normand¹⁴, some principles of the NPG, translated into educational policies, would be aimed at “professionalization and empowerment of school managers, the definition of quality indicators and benchmarks on educational success”, external evaluations of results and school performance as a criterion for funding schools and teachers’ remuneration¹⁴.

This orientation in favor of a culture of results through a “school market”, with a regulatory and evaluating State, has become predominant in policies for the remodeling of education at the global level, since the 1990⁸, and in which ngp is the predominant standard of Western governments¹⁰.

Power in organizational culture and political narratives

Defined by Alvesson¹ as a “framework of beliefs, symbols and expressive values”, organizational culture is the mechanism by which individuals share and learn experiences, meanings and understandings, reproduced and communicated partially also symbolically¹. Thus,

cultural meanings define the construction and execution of an organization and, at the same time, its understanding and evaluation⁴.

When leaders influence culture or act on a set of understandings and meanings, in order for everyone involved in organizations to take over them, a subtle and often penetrating form of power may be being exercised¹.

Regarding the numerous voices to refer to power in organizations, Hardy and Clegg¹⁶ point mainly to the “seemingly pragmatic concept, appropriate to use, but also to abuse”. In a strategic, descriptive and empirical posture, the question of power matters “how it is used to transform people into characters who articulate a game of organizational morality”¹⁶, since it becomes difficult to define or precisely delimit it¹.

Power relations are important to the formation of culture, since a view of reality would be the result of negotiations between the actors involved in asymmetric power relations, and in which some of these actors have access to different resources, and different possibilities of deciding how reality should be defined¹.

Considered as “microtechniques” of these power relations, the cultural practices of reaffirmation, empowerment, moral persuasion and even technical knowledge would result, as Hardy and Clegg¹⁶ describe, in “personal, technical, bureaucratic or legal surveillance, expanded by forms of supervision, routineization, formalization, or legislation, which seek to increase control over the behavior, disposition and incorporation of employees”.

Legislation, as a legal device and with its narratives, can be considered as a translator of political knowledge, and this formed by a discursive practice that, for Foucault⁷, leads and is linked to other practices, methods and techniques, yielding space to a specific social way and interfering in a general transformation of society¹⁷. Thus, throughout society, when producing a discourse, procedures - of conjuring powers and mastering of random events - control, select, organize and redistribute their production⁷.

Likewise, on the role of political knowledge in capitalism, Foucault¹⁷ describes serving “the interests of the bourgeois class, which was made by her and for her, which carries, finally, the stigma of its origins even in its concepts and in its logical architecture, [...] analyzed in the direction of behaviors, struggles, conflicts, decisions and techniques”.

Therefore, from the perspective of political knowledge and political discourse, organizations do not always present complete or coherent policies when structuring their narratives and plots in the formulation of their policies to make sense of their environment². Instead, policymakers try

plausible plots, adjusted to current facts, events, conventional models and indicators, deeply concerned with maintaining control of their domains and how their action will be interpreted².

Also for Brown¹⁸, when dealing with how a public inquiry builds meaning to complex events, and how decision-making is represented and authorized in it, he pointed out a key issue in policy formulation: how a text extends its hegemonic influence. For a text to be hegemonically effective, it needs to be received as official, with the authority assigned by its readers¹⁸, or even, received as legitimate, as an appropriate or appropriate action within some socially constructed structure⁴.

Many organizations, when trying to obtain legitimacy, use as a strategy the manipulation of environments and preventive intervention in the cultural environment, in order to develop support for specific measures, which goes beyond the selection of existing cultural beliefs, but which actively promulgates new explanations of the social reality⁴.

In the case of NGP, as Verger and Normand¹⁴ point out, many authors apply World Cultural Theory^c to understand the global spread of school-based management and NPG in education. To understand the most important characteristics of this dissemination, it would be necessary to adopt a culturalist perspective, to emphasize global processes of cultural rationalization in which the behavior of individuals is defined, appropriate and legitimized in the context of organizations¹⁹.

Verger and Normand¹⁴ note that NGP-related policies in education are implemented, not because they are efficient, but because there is a widespread understanding that the proposed solutions will solve a significant part of the urgent problems of contemporary educational systems. As forces underlying their influence and expansion, this generalized social perception has discursive factors, ideational structures, and logics of action and interpretation of the outside world, promulgated by policymakers - thus, the NGP would function as a powerful paradigm of politics that, with its political narratives, acts in reducing the usual uncertainty about decisions about educational reform or school improvement¹⁴.

Materials and Methods

Aiming to analyze the narratives of power in the formulation of the political action Award “Transformation School”, this study was identified as a qualitative-interpretative research, of

^c Meyer *et al.*²⁰ points to World Cultural Theory as a translocal cultural project, developed as such by the various elites, which involved an ideological conception of a new society, with all individuals in a unified way, with a progressive collectivity and with mass education as one of the central characteristics of this project of cultural articulation.

inductive method and by inquisition, since it assumes that the meanings are derived mainly from words²¹.

The research was initiated with the collection of secondary data, having as main source the document establishing the Award “Transformation School” - Resolution n. 4524, of March 2021¹¹. For this, it was considered that knowledge is not only contained in experiments, but also in narratives, norms, legislations, and political deliberations¹⁷.

The corpus was defined so that it could take the history and temporality of the research object, which deals with domains such as timeliness, memory and anticipation, and that characterized repetitions, ideas of rupture and transformation, and what is at the frontier of current time²².

For data analysis, the documentary and Foucaultian discourse analyses were reconciled. The first method of analysis followed that proposed by Bardin²³, since it aimed to represent the information of the object analyzed in another way, in a variable form and facilitating access to the observer, and as a preliminary phase to other analyses. The analysis of foucaultian discourse was performed based on the categories presented according to Chart 1.

Chart 1 – Method categories in Foucault.

Categories	Description
Statements	They are atoms of speech; most basic unit; it has no fixed form or immutable content; it needs to be correlated with other utterances; it is different from a simple sentence; is different from proposition; it is different from speech acts; although they can assume these forms, they do not submit to them.
Enunciative functions	Indicates how the utterance “acts” on a given subject; it is part of the utterance itself; Foucault (2014a) establishes criteria to identify the functions in the utterances: referential, subject, field and materiality.
Formation rules	Formations are derived from certain rules; the rules serve to identify formations; Foucault (2014a) also establishes criteria to identify the rules: object, modality, concept and strategy; are equivalent to the criteria of the enunciative functions.
Discursive formation	Discursive formation is the derivation of statements, functions and rules; the historical elements are fundamental to understand the formations; problematizes the production of knowledge; are subjected to a certain regularity.

Source: Lacerda and Mello²⁴.

The choice of this subsequent analysis started from foucault’s conception of discourse¹⁷ as “a good that places, since its existence, the question of power [...] a good that is, by nature, the object of a struggle, and a political struggle [...] a set of utterances that relies on the same system of formation”. Furthermore, the discourse as enunciated neither visible nor hidden that, to be

described, must be considered this existence and interrogate this language in the dimension that produces it¹⁷.

The analyses were initiated by describing the statement in the Award Resolution, and by structuring the research corpus. Next, we sought to distinguish the enunciative functions of the subject - his reference, field and materiality - and the rules of formation, within the object, modality, concept and strategy criteria. The combination of the utterance, functions and rules led to the main discursive formations for the outcome of the analyses.

The results and analyses are presented in the next sections of this article, structured in two sections: (1) a linear report of the political utterance of the “Transformation School” Award, structured by documentary analysis, and with subsequent identification of discursive formations by the Foucaultian analysis method (derived from the utterance, functions and rules of formation); and (2) the textual claims of authority and power that drive that discourse.

Results

The “Transformation School” Award is presented as instituted by the State Department of Education of Minas Gerais (SEE) (*political subject*), for public schools (*political subject*) with emphasis on the results of performance and school flow in the stages of regular education¹¹. Furthermore, the award would aim to openly recognize efficient school practices and experiences in the process of improving the quality of teaching¹¹.

A maximum of nine hundred prizes would be distributed to schools in the period of 2021, and the same school may be awarded more than once during the year, in case of meeting the criteria to receive the award.

Similarly, the award presents the institution of the School Transformation Index (Inest), calculated based on two more indicators: school flow indicator and performance indicator, responsible for presenting the performance of each school grade.

According to SEE¹¹, the school flow indicator is configured by the harmonic average of the bimonthly approval rates of the years of schooling of each stage of education, which, in turn, are calculated through the frequency and grades recorded in the Digital School Diary (DED).

Likewise, the performance indicator is configured by the average between the Portuguese language proficiency and mathematics of the students, provided that they are identified in the Minas Gerais System of School Administration (Simade), and provided that they participate in three

network evaluations: diagnostic evaluation, first quarterly evaluation and second quarterly evaluation¹¹.

In the Resolution, the first award is a maximum of 300 awards, aimed at schools that obtain better averages among the defined criteria: participation rate of students in the diagnostic evaluation of the year and the index of use by teachers of the online platform indicated by SEE¹¹. At this stage of the award, no financial values were foreseen, but only certification to the awarded schools.

Regarding the participation rate of students, it is determined by the ratio between the students who performed the evaluation and enrolled students, and should be equal to or greater than 80% in the components of Portuguese and mathematics, and equal to or greater than 60% in the components of other areas of knowledge¹¹.

On the other hand, the index of access by teachers to an electronic platform specified by see is calculated by the average of the weekly percentages of online access of teachers of each school during the bimonthly¹¹. To monitor this specific index, each school can accompany it periodically, through a panel, to be made available by SEE, which must be equal to or greater than 80% in the bimester.

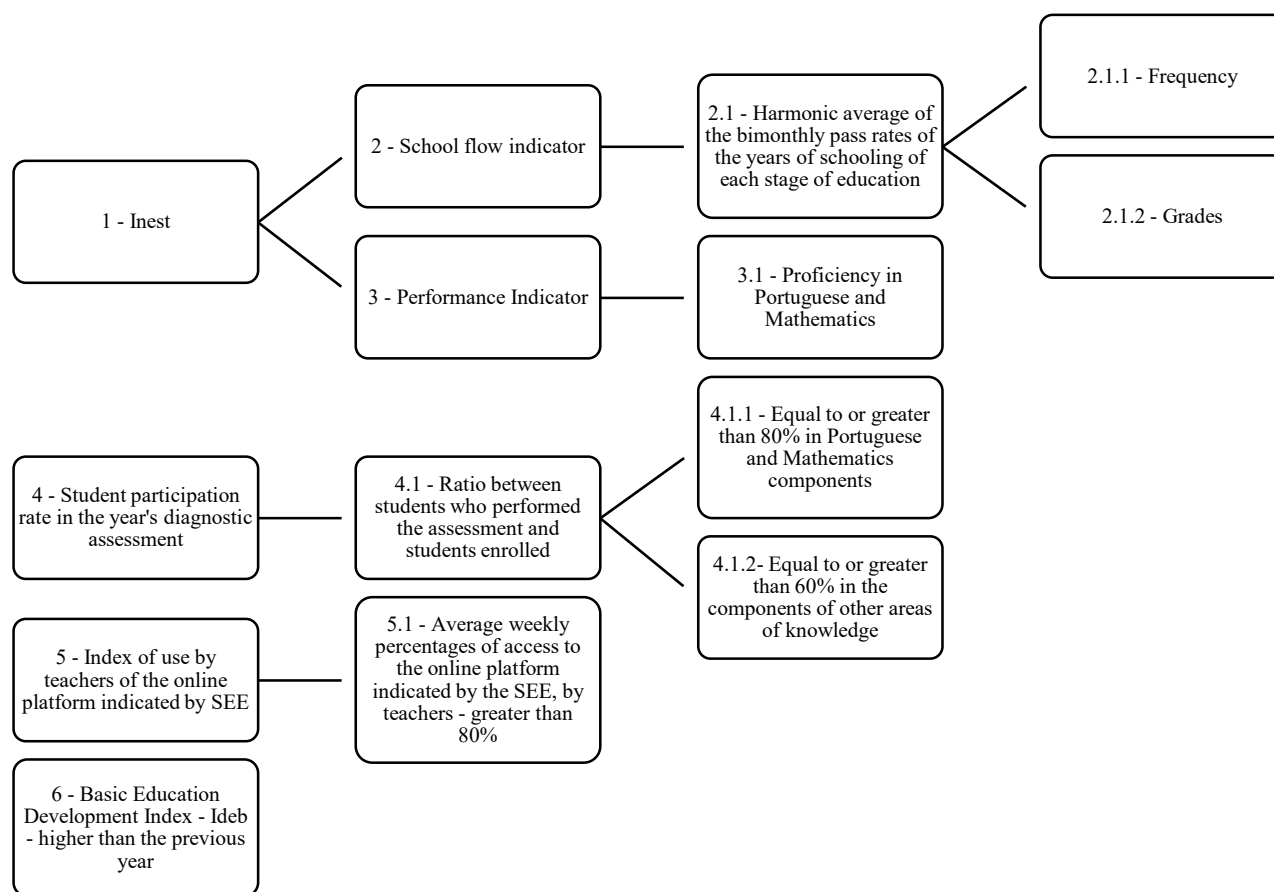
The second award is aimed at schools that score higher Inest-2 and higher positive percentages between Inest-1 and Inest-2¹¹. The value of the award is one hundred thousand BRL, with the exception of financial and budgetary availability.

Likewise, the third prize is aimed at schools with higher Inest-3 scores, per teaching stage, and higher positive percentages between Inest-2 and Inest-3¹¹. The value of the award is two hundred thousand reais, also with the exception of financial and budgetary availability, divided into a first installment, at the time of presentation of the result; and the second, after confirming the increase in the Basic Education Development Index – Ideb (*Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica*, in Portuguese), compared to the previous Ideb result¹¹.

According to the document, SEE will disclose the results of Inest on a specific website, and the dissemination of the awarded schools will be in the Official Gazette of the State of Minas Gerais (DOEMG) and also in SEE¹¹.

Finally, in order to use the resources of the award, the award-winning schools have a portfolio of pedagogical projects submitted by SEE, with predetermined actions, and provided that they have the board's agreement. These schools can be investigated by the School Inspection Service of the Regional Departments of Education (SRE), and in the case of irregularities, the school loses the award, the appeal is returned and those responsible, held accountable¹¹.

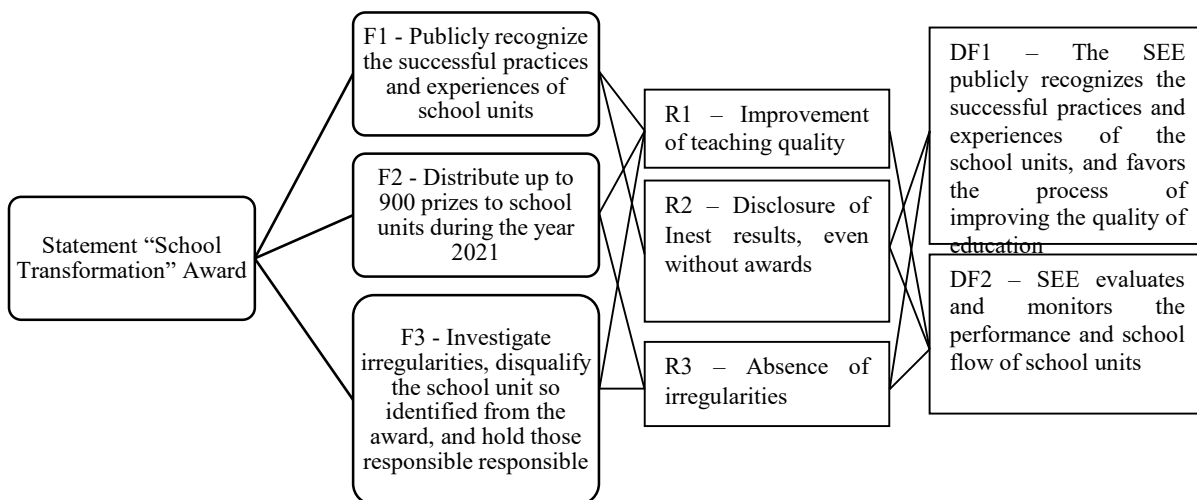
Figure 1 – Summary of performance indicators and evaluations of the “Transformation School” Award.



In Figure 1, it is possible to observe the indexes, indicators and rates determined in the “Transformation School” Award, and the composition of each one, besides being possible to evidence the domination of educational policies by the “school market” and the “culture of results” and also to evidence the massively accounting understanding of educational activity, through the determination of performance indicators and a generalized evaluation logic⁸. These evidences point to the structure of ngp, based on elements of the business mode of management of organizations, and which would aim to improve education in the State of MG.

As for the discursive formations, through foucaultian analysis of the discourse described in the methodology, Figure 2 presents the functions F1, F2, F3 and F4 of the political subject state government (SEE), identified in the award statement. Three rules (R1, R2 and R3) were also identified in favor of fulfilling these functions, and their relations in the discursive formations (DF) in relation to the political subject.

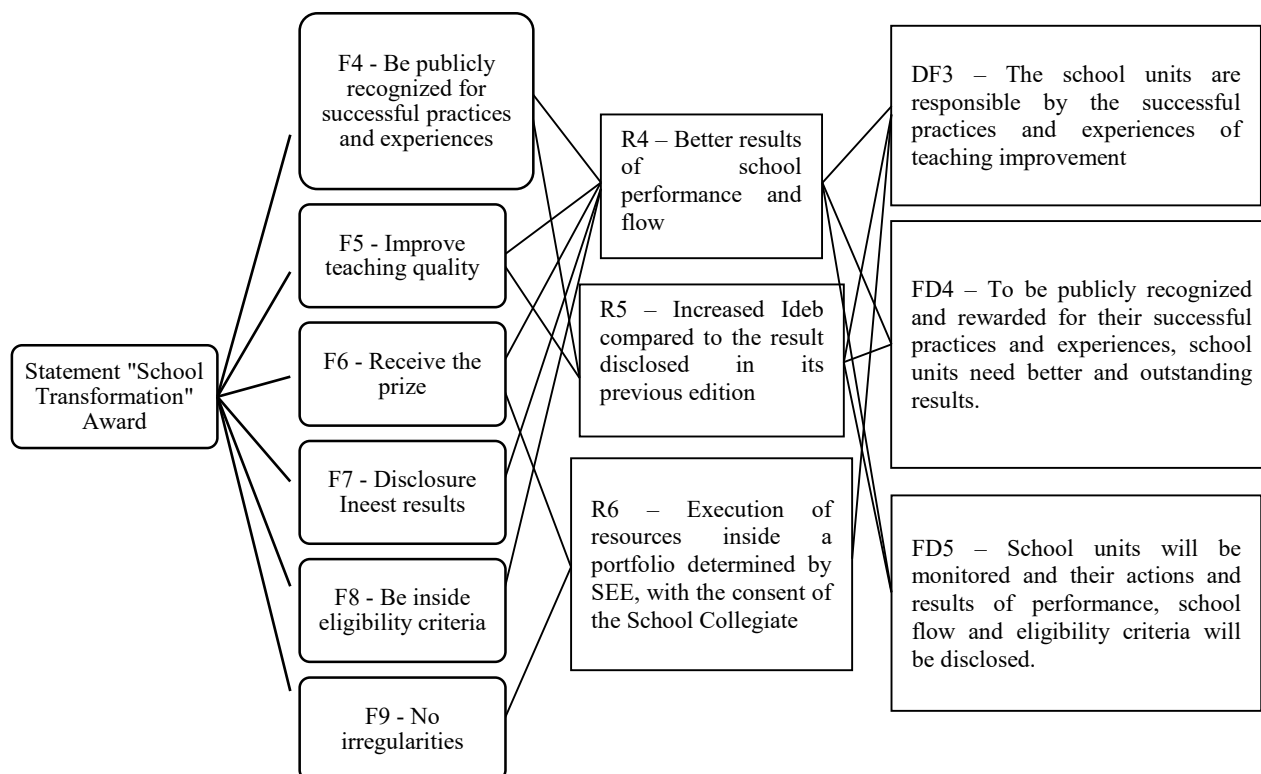
Figure 2 – Map of relations in the discursive formations of the political subject state government of Minas Gerais.



Source: Adapted from Lacerda and Mello²⁴.

Next, Figure 3 presents the functions F4 to F9 related to the political subject “school units”, also identified in the award statement. Three rules related to schools were also identified, with their relationships in the discursive formations (DF) presented.

Figure 3 – Map of relations in the discursive formations of the political subject “school units”.



Source: Adapted from Lacerda and Mello²⁴.

Discussion

The different discursive formations of the state government and school units, as well as the enunciative functions and rules demonstrate a solid framework of schools – via legislation – to the state reform movement (NGP), the rationality imported from the economic world and the “spirit of enterprise”⁸.

According to the figures presented above, the principles of the NGP were evident as an educational political action¹⁴: in Figure 1 the definitions of quality indicators and benchmarks, external evaluations of results and school performance; and figures 2 and 3, the monitoring and publications of the results obtained by schools (DF2 and DF5), and the financing of school institutions, based on meritocracy and the ability to produce results (DF1, DF3 and DF4).

From the discursive formations, it can be understood that school units are held responsible for successful results, but that they will also be held responsible for the contrary results; and to be publicly recognized and awarded, school units need better results; and will be monitored and will have their actions and performance results, school flow and eligibility criteria disclosed. And in the same statement, the state government appears as recognizing the practices and successful experiences of school units, as responsible for improving the quality of public education, and as evaluator and regulator of the performance and school flow of school units.

Also based on the evidence presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3, it was possible to unravel the existing power dynamics of the narratives⁶ of the Award, based on the considerations that narratives present themselves as tools to make sense of organizational situations and increase organizational legitimacy^{3,4}.

The discursive formations and the number of indicators, rates and evaluations involved in the “Transformation School” Award demonstrate the relationship of asymmetric power between schools and the state government¹. They also demonstrate the subjection of school units, as characters of a game of organizational morality¹⁶, to the form of power exercised by the government.

The state government is a political subject that recognizes successful schools, and thus provides the improvement of the quality of teaching. On the other hand, schools are the *political subjects* monitored, have their actions and their results disseminated, are responsible for the results, and will only be recognized and publicly awarded if they are successful in better and outstanding results.

Still as a *political subject* who decides what reality will be like in schools, this government demonstrates its “microtechnique” of power, by influencing, expanding and determining a cultural practice through legislation^{14,16}. A cultural practice resulting from a technical, bureaucratic and legal surveillance, aimed at increasing control over the conduct, arrangement and admission of the culture of results and NGP in schools¹⁶.

The Award demonstrates a discourse far from being configured as peaceful, but as a place of exercise of government power⁷, which seeks to legitimize the culture of results, intervening in the cultural environment of schools and promulgating a reality⁴ of distrust and evaluative surveillance⁸ in the utterance supported by the act of rewarding.

Likewise, the state government confirms itself as a regulator and evaluator¹⁴, which operates the transformation of schools through policies adjusted to the interests and interference of a capitalist society¹⁷, and which is concerned with influencing hegemonically and maintaining control of its domain^{2,18}.

Final thoughts

By unveiling the existing power dynamics and the culture and meanings expressed in the power narratives of one of the actions of the educational public policy of Minas Gerais, entitled “Transformation School” Award, it was possible to highlight points of a peacemaking discourse, presented as an Award, but which aims to expand and legitimize a culture of results and the discourse of the NGP.

In the analyses, the culturalist perspective became notorious in the process of understanding the dissemination of a culture and discourse as a defined, appropriate and legitimized behavior in education.

Indentally, it was evident that the cultural definitions of how the school should be organized, understood and evaluated are based on asymmetric power relations between the state government and the school units, in order for all those involved to take on new understandings and new cultural meanings.

Therefore, the hegemonic influence of the government on educational culture and its concern to maintain control of its domain, as a regulatory political subject and evaluator of cultural practices determined through legislation, stand out.

Thus, it highlights the importance of understanding the policies and interests of its formulators, in order to contribute to unveil the existing power dynamics - both in political

struggles, as in the reproduction of cultural understandings and meanings - a dynamic that aims to establish a specific view of reality.

Finally, since this article is the beginning of a larger and complex process of analysis of an educational political action, such as continuity of research on the power narratives of the “Transformation School” Award, a study is suggested in the school units, where policies are implemented. In schools it will be possible to understand how the different discursive formations actually happen and also understand how is the practice of this process of trying to expand and legitimize the culture of results and the discourse of the NGP, through the existing power dynamics.

Authors' contributions

Freitas VAF contributed to the conception and design of the research, data collection, data analysis and interpretation and in the writing of the manuscript. Pereira MSF contributed to the conception and design of the research and critical review of the manuscript regarding intellectual content and final presentation.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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