

# Leadership of the Portuguese Community Schools in the East Coast of the United States and the Public Policies of Education: A Multiple Case Study

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**Abstract:** The Portuguese community schools of the United States located in the areas of larger Portuguese population concentration are social organizations that come materializing throughout decades the designs of the educative policies of the Portuguese government in relation to the expansion and preservation of the language, the culture and the history of Portugal. These designs of the educative policies are enrolled in the Constitution of the Republic (1976), in the Basic Law of Educative System (1986) and, over all, in the successive legislative norms (Decree-laws and ordinances) of the successive governments. Portuguese community schools in the United States are structuralized in analogous way to schools of the Portuguese geographic space.

For this qualitative study (multiple case), four directors of Portuguese schools of the East Coast of the United States were interviewed; two schools are in the state of Rhode Island and the other two are in the state of Massachusetts. Also, it was administered the questionnaire on practices of leadership “*Leadership Practices Inventory*” (LPI) of Kouzes and Posner (2002) to collect additional data about practices of leadership on the directors of the schools. The LPI evaluates practices of leadership classifying them in five domains: (a) Model the way; (b) Inspire a shared vision; (c) Challenge the process; (d) Enable others to act; and, (e) Encourage the heart.

Results of this qualitative research indicate that the Portuguese Government has not had an educative policy stimulant, coherent and consistent of support, incentive, maintenance and diffusion of the Portuguese language and culture and the directors of the studied schools they have a proactive and serving leadership style in conducting the management of Portuguese community schools. The five practices of leadership are highly practiced by the directors of the studied schools above all the practices “*Enable others to act*” and “*Encourage the heart*”.

**Key words:** leadership; Portuguese community schools; practices of leadership; language and culture identity

## 1. Introduction

The ethnic groups try to reproduce in their new environments the traditions, the customs and the systems of organization of the mother-land. Among the various forms of communitarian organizations are the “ethnic schools”, educational institutions with a basic common objective: To teach and to preserve the language and the culture of one determined ethnic group. While that Joshua Fishman (1966) considers those schools as the factor

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most active in the maintenance of the language in the biggest part of the ethnic communities, Bradunas and Topping (1988) describe those same schools as formal manifestations of adaptations of the immigrants to the American society.

Are counted by the thousands the ethnic schools that in the United States which continue to provide an alternative education and/or supplemental education to many American children (Fishman, 1980a) and among these thousands are about seventy Portuguese Official Schools (POS). With a long historical tradition, the Portuguese communities in the United States have come to create and to keep these schools for almost a century (Bradunas & Topping, 1988).

For many Luso-Americans, the Portuguese Official Schools (POS) represent the natural symbiosis with the language and Portuguese culture and a community effort in the direction of awakening the conscience and sensitivity of the children for the cultural values inherited from their parents and grandparents (Bento, “*A educação: Da família à escola*”, 1985) and to perpetuate our language, culture and identity in the time and communitarian Luso-American space.

### **1.1 The Ethnic Schools in the United States**

Joshua Fishman, leader and pioneer in researching the Ethnic instruction relates that the United States, as the greater multilingual and multicultural nation cannot disdain the thousands of schools and the hundreds of thousands of children that the ethnic schools serve. Fishman (1980a) affirms:

These schools must be enclosed in the list of our educational, social and intellectual resources for national reasons given the fact that the United States cannot give itself the luxury to ignore six thousand schools attended by six hundred thousand children (p. 236).

The Ethnic Schools are supplemental schools functioning between six and 10 hours per week and between three to five sessions of two hours each (Bradunas & Topping, 1988). According to Fishman (1989), linguistic education is only one of the multiple objectives of the ethnic schools. The education of traditions and history of ancestors, the wakening and the development of the ethnic identity, the improvement of communication between parents and children and the creation of chances for the members of the community to work and to socialize among them, are also essential objectives of great importance. In this way, Ethnic Schools had given an important and independent contribution to the maintenance of ethnic languages and cultures. Bentley (1982) affirms:

For besides keeping the identity and increasing academic education, the proficiency in two languages is one advantage in a cosmopolitan world. Nine of ten Americans don't know how to speak, to read or to understand another language for beyond the English. An education that leads to a high degree of bilingualism in English and a minority language is of great value for this country (p. 114).

As all the other ethnic schools, the POS transmit to its pupils significant levels of reading, writing and comprehension of the Portuguese language. Moreover, POS give also emphasis to history, literature, customs and traditions to the Portuguese people.

### **1.2 Language and Cultural Identity**

The language is not only one instrument of communication. According to Haugen (1974), the language is a social instrument that follows and gives existence to all the other social institutions because the language is the base of all the others institutions of the society. The language is also a social and personal symbol. Grosjean (1982) affirms that the language is “... a social symbol and of group identity, an emblem of belonging and solidarity” (p.

177). Being, thus, an instrument of communication, a personal and social symbol, the language is imbued of attitudes and values for those who use it and for those who do not know how to speak this same language.

Languages and cultures are interrelated, forming the “cement” that holds together a community and their members and justify the existence of those communities and even our societies. Joshua Fishman (1999) told us the following:

What is most unique and basic about the link between language and culture is the fact that in huge areas of real life the language is the culture and that neither law nor education nor religion nor government nor politics nor social organizations would be possible without it (p. 445).

On the other side, the ethnic identity is also linked profoundly to language. If neither ethnicity nor ethnic identity has been definitively defined nor exhaustively investigated, then their link to language must also suffer accordingly, both in theory and in practice. States Fishman:

Indeed, the classic masters and founders of the social science disciplines generally ignored language altogether, considering it a constant (like breathing). They believed that it provided no variance to explain or that it was simply a redundancy with respect to ethnicity, both designate being expected to disappear in the more unified future that was presumably just over the horizon (1999, p. 449).

Thus, in our modern and “smaller” world, language, ethnicity and culture continue to be linked altogether, giving specific characteristics and attributes to different communities and to our societies.

Tse (1997) concluded in his research study that the individuals that judge its group (or members) favorably have more positive attitudes and better proficiency in the language of their group. On the other hand, Maietta (1996) argues that it is important to know the attitudes in relation to the native language as an essential condition for the understanding of the preservation of the language as well as of this process.

According to some researchers (Arias, 1976; Ribeiro, 1981; Becker, 1990, etc.), American schools have minimized the importance and even ignored the culture of minority children instead of serving as facilitators of cultural adaptation.

In her master’s thesis (Castanho, 1993) about the attitudes and preferences of the pupils of 4th, 5th, and 6th grades in relation to reading in the POS concluded that the parents play an important role in the development of positive attitudes in relation to the Portuguese community and in keeping alive the Portuguese language at home through verbal communication. Another master’s thesis “Luso descending in the United States: The Portuguese school of Hartford” (Galo, 1997) had as basic objective to verify the interest of the pupils for the Portuguese language and culture and to determine the factors that cause that interest. Results of this thesis had shown that the positive degree of that interest depended in great measure on the youths’ parents, schools and community.

Becker (1990), investigating the role of the public school in the construction of the ethnic identity of the Portuguese pupils who attended an urban school in New England disclosed the existence of a discrepancy between explicit norms of the educational policies and the practices of the educational ones: “The Portuguese pupils had entered in the public school with feelings of ethnic pride and had left with ideas of inferiority and shame” (p. 54).

Finally, another study (Nunes, n.d.), took place in the middle of the Luso-Canadian community It concluded that: (a) The loss of the language and Portuguese culture, particularly in the young people, is exacerbated by the governmental lack of promotion and support in cultural and linguistic activities, and, (b) Existence of strong feelings of cultural duality and cultural conflict among the young Portuguese.

The cultural identification is very important for the personal and social realization of the minority individual and the group that belongs to; All the human being is incomplete if it will not be absorbed in a specific culture, affirms Cushman (1990).

### **1.3 Language Maintenance and Language Shift in the United States**

The study of language maintenance and language shift concerns the relationship between stability and change in habitual language use on one hand, and on-going psychological, social or cultural processes on the other, when populations with different languages must coexist (Fishman & Markman, 1979). Maintenance is, therefore, the effort of minority groups to preserve and use their mother tongue; and, language shift is an increasing reliance on the language of the host society and a gradual loss (decreasing reliance on) a minority's native tongue (Bento, 2001).

In the United States, a country in which worldwide languages and cultures exist, minority groups, usually, shift away quite rapidly from their native languages to English (Grosjean, 1982). Veltman (1983) theorizes that when two linguistic groups meet, a process develops in which speakers first retain their native language tenaciously but inevitably give it up in favor of the host language.

In the case of language maintenance, retention of native language — often, native monolingualism — is the norm throughout life. In the case of language assimilation, English monolingualism is the norm, followed by an intermediate stage of bilingualism. According to Veltman (1983), during the intermediate stage of bilingualism, the native language relinquishes its control over communication to English.

In fact, immigrant parents remain monolingual in their native language only if they live in a close-knit ethnic community where they can work, shop, and converse with friends and relatives in their language (Grosjean, 1983). This way of life, quite normal decades ago, is still a reality in the Portuguese-American communities of New Bedford (Massachusetts), Newark (New Jersey) and San Jose (California). However, most first generations Americans, especially if they are young, soon come into contact with the English speaking majority and become bilingual.

While most remain bilingual for the rest of their lives, a few choose to assimilate quickly in order to become monolingual speakers of English. Grosjean (1982) describes the language patterns of children born to first generation Americans:

Some are bilingual from the beginning and some are monolingual in English if for instance the parents want to assimilate as rapidly as possible. Most of them follow a straightforward route: their early language input will be native language of their parents provided that they are the first born and that their parents speak the native language at home (p. 104).

For example, let's consider a Portuguese couple who has a child a few years after arriving to the United States. If the couple speaks Portuguese to their child, that child's first words will be in Portuguese language. In this sense, the child's life is monolingual in the Portuguese language. Sometimes, and very rapidly, English enters the child's life, perhaps through interaction on the playground, television, tablets, and English speaking friends of the family or day care. However, living in a close-knit Portuguese speaking community, the child, instead, may hear less English and therefore may retain this monolingualism until he or she goes to school. After two or three years of instruction in English, the child becomes fluent in English and consequently bilingual in the home language and in English. What happens from this point on? Will the child remain bilingual, or will he or she shift entirely to English?

Grosjean (1982) contends that if the parents are bilingual and if the social pressure to use English consists of very strong “peers pressure or negative attitudes of the English-speaking majority toward the minority” (pp. 104-105) then the child will slowly shift to using English. However, if communication in the home and with friends is done mainly in the native language, and if enough psychological factors (including religion and cultural activism) encourage communication in the native language, then the child will remain bilingual and will grow up proficient in both languages.

#### **1.4 Portuguese Communitarian Schools in the East Coast of the United States**

According to data collected by Castanho (2010) there were in the United States 65 Portuguese community schools distributed by 13 states with 3,286 pupils and 210 teachers. In the state of Massachusetts there were 9 schools and Rhode Island it had 5 schools and a Portuguese population of 279,722 in Massachusetts and 91,445 in Rhode Island.

The state of Massachusetts has the following Portuguese community schools:

- Portuguese Official school of Cambridge and Somerville
- Portuguese school of Hudson
- Portuguese school of Ludlow
- Portuguese school of Milford
- Portuguese Official school of Peabody
- Portuguese United for Education (in New Bedford)
- Portuguese school of Casa da Saudade (in New Bedford)
- Portuguese Official school of Fall River
- Portuguese school of Taunton

The state of Rhode **Island** has the following schools:

- Portuguese school of the Youth Lusitana Club (in Central Falls)
- Portuguese school of Pawtucket
- Portuguese Official school of East Providence
- Portuguese Official school of Bristol
- Portuguese school of Cranston

## **2. Methodology**

As stated previously, as an additional data collection, it was used the questionnaire *Leadership Practices Inventory* of Kouzes and Posner (2002), an instrument with 30 items that evaluates the practices of leadership and distributes them in five great areas:

- **Model the way:** to lead from what one believes in, starting by clarification of personal values; to give the example, to be the behavior model that we expect from others; to reach the right and the respect to lead through the involvement and direct individual action.
- **Inspire a shared vision:** To have a vision of the future, to imagine the attractive possibilities for all the organization; to involve the others in a common vision, from the deep knowledge of his/her dreams, hopes, aspirations and values.
- **Challenge the process:** To recognize good ideas, to support them and to show will to defy the system to get new services and adopted systems; to try and to run risks, originating constantly small victories and learning

with the errors.

- **Enable others to act:** To promote the contribution of all, fomenting cooperative objectives, cooperative and constructing confidence; to value the others, sharing power and discretion; to use the word “we”.
- **Encourage the heart:** To recognize the contributions, through the appreciation for the individual Excellency; to celebrate the values and the victories, creating a spirit community.

The LPI consists of 30 affirmations, six sets of affirmations to measure each one of the five practices of exemplary leaders. Each affirmation has a punctuation of five points in a *Likert type* scale (1–Never, 2–Occasionally, 3–Some times, 4–Many times and 5–Frequently) (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). With this scale, the respondents indicated the frequency with that they practiced the described actions in each one of the affirmations.

As already stated, we conducted four semi structured interviews to the four directors of schools (two in Massachusetts and two in Rhode Island).

### 3. Results

The analysis of the results of the leadership questionnaires (LPI) indicated that the directors of the studied schools have a proactive and serving style of leadership in the conduction of the management of Portuguese’s community schools. The five practices of leadership highly practiced by the directors of the studied schools were, specially, the following: “*Enable others to act*” (average = 29) and “Encourage the heart” (Average = 28.5). The other practices of leadership had gotten also high averages — Inspire a shared vision (28.1), Model the way (27.6) and Challenge the process (27.1).

The content analysis of the four interviews allowed us to arrive at the following conclusions in several categories:

**Leadership and decision making:** The ones interviewed exert a leadership of collegiate, collaborative, democratic, voluntarism and aggregated type of personal values. It affirmed one interviewed: “the leader has to perceive that the others also are individual leaders; the school is not the school of Professor X, is our school, of all of us; it is the faculty, the totality that deserves the distinction, the recognition for the work that the school has made ” (I # 1). In the same direction, another participant said: “What I say to the teachers it is that here all of us are in “equal foot”, to have availability, what I can do, I always ask for contributions of my colleagues; no decision is taken without being articulated among us and with the parents as well” (I # 4). One other participant, stated: “For me it is very important that the school functions with great success, or either, that the children are learning Portuguese, is for that, that they are here that feel protected are loved and respected; and, not only the pupils but also the teachers and the school commission” (I # 3).

**Qualities of the Director:** The participants had related that a leader of a Portuguese communitarian school must have certain attributes such as, sense of balance, being friend of the colleagues and pupils, capacity of initiative and organization, deep knowledge of the Portuguese language and culture and sensitivity for the necessities of the educational community and of the “parents who are the pillars of the Portuguese schools” (I # 4). Stated the first one interviewed (I # 1) “the Director it is a landmark, the fiduciary office of the scale, guarantees the cohesion and even the appropriate behavior, everything he makes in the school”.

**Support of Portugal:** The participants interviewed related that the support from Portugal is nonexistent almost null, financially. It has had some collaboration with the cession of some manual to some schools although those materials are out of our context our reality in the present time; The Coordination, headquartered in

Washington, is far away from the communities in such a way, geographic and pedagogically. It affirmed the participant (I # 4): “it does not have and we are not waiting to receive checks from Portugal but there are other supports that do not demand great investments: curriculum development, materials thought with our opinion, people who work here in the field, and to place all in the same page.”

#### **4. Conclusions**

This research study, qualitative in nature, and multiple case, intended to assess the leadership styles and the perceptions of the directors of four Portuguese schools in the United States related to the Portuguese language, culture and traditions as well as the communication with the Portuguese government and its representatives in the area of education in the United States; for those purposes we interviewed four directors of the Portuguese schools in the east coast of the United States (two in Rhode Island and two in Massachusetts); also, we administered the questionnaire on practices of leadership “Leadership Practices Inventory” (LPI) of Kouzes and Posner (2002) to collect additional data about the practices of leadership of those same directors.

The minority groups in the United States and in other parts of the world tend to preserve and maintain their languages, cultures and their ethnicity through various means. One of the major instruments used are the ethnic or community schools which teach to the new generations the language, the values, the culture and the traditions of their ancestors. The Portuguese communities in the United States have been maintaining these ethnic schools for almost one hundred years. The Portuguese community schools are organizations rooted in its communities that are facing, on the present time, some challenges. Portuguese schools are led by people with great service spirit, deep cultural and language identity, and, devotion to the cause of the education of the Portuguese language and culture to the Portuguese descendants. They expect from Portugal and the Coordination Cabinet more support and orientation (and not so much financial support) in the elaboration of adequate materials appropriate to the reality of the learning public (they are now teaching the third generation no more the second) as well as orientation on audiovisual materials that represent the uses and customs of the several regions of Portugal (I # 3).

The lack of communication among the several Portuguese schools is well-known and would be very important its regular existence. There had not been meetings with the Coordination neither with the Regional Assessor. Stated one interviewed (I # 4) “There are not and we are not waiting to receive checks from Portugal but there are other supports that do not demand great investments: curriculum development, materials developed with our opinion, people who work here in the field and to place all on the same page”.

It would be important that the expectations of the schools relating to the mission of the Coordination of the Portuguese language in the United States be clarified. Perhaps the priorities of the mission of the Coordination are others, divergent of the expectations that community schools keep.

Finally, the Portuguese Government must pay attention to the necessities of the Portuguese community schools therefore “... it is a moral obligation of Portugal to support the teaching situations of integrated education, as well as the community schools with quality teaching, therefore we need everyone to dignify the Portuguese language in the foreign countries”(Castanho, 2010, p. 61).

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