

“Listening to everyone”: School counselors’ governance, mental health and family education change in Amazon schools

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ABSTRACT. Rural education in the Amazon faces context-specific challenges in school mental health support, amplified by transformations in family education (FE). This exploratory qualitative case study investigates how school counselors (SCs) in a Roraima rural high school perceive and enact their role amid FE transformations, using Ethics of Care and Educational Governance frameworks. The research question is: “How do SCs perceive, assess, and rationalize their role as mental health caregivers in a context of a changing FE?” Semi-structured interviews were conducted with SCs and auxiliary teachers (n=8 participants). Data were analyzed using content analysis, organized into six dimensions: perceived family transformations, effects on students, counselor functions, care practices, educational governance, and institutional barriers. Results show SCs perceive a delegation of FE to schools, driven by parents’ lack of time and unregulated smartphone usage. Consequently, impacts on cognitive skills and mental health are perceived. SCs respond via an integration of educational governance (as the basis), conflict management and care practices. However, interventions are constrained by a lack of specialized staff, half-day shift limitations, and excess of bureaucratic work. In conclusion, there is a need to restructure SC roles, reduce administrative burdens, and of full-day schooling. SCs could become managers of holistic education.

Keywords: rural education, educational governance, mental health care, conflict management, school counseling.

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“Ouvir todo mundo”: governança dos orientadores educacionais, saúde mental e mudanças na educação familiar em escolas da Amazônia

RESUMO. A educação do campo na Amazônia enfrenta desafios únicos no suporte à saúde mental, agravados por transformações estruturais na educação familiar. Este estudo de caso qualitativo investiga como orientadores educacionais em uma escola de ensino médio na área rural de Roraima percebem e exercem seus papéis diante dessas mudanças domésticas. Entrevistas semiestruturadas foram realizadas com orientadores e professores auxiliares (n=8). Os dados foram processados via análise de conteúdo e estruturados em seis dimensões: transformações familiares percebidas, efeitos nos estudantes, funções dos orientadores, práticas de cuidado, governança educacional e barreiras institucionais. Os resultados revelam uma percepção de delegação da socialização básica para a escola, motivada pela escassez de tempo dos pais devido a pressões econômicas e pelo uso desregulado de telas. Como consequência, os alunos manifestam declínio em habilidades não cognitivas e sofrimento emocional. Os orientadores respondem por meio de uma matriz integrada onde a governança educacional atua como eixo central, complementada pela gestão de conflitos e práticas de cuidado. Contudo, barreiras como ausência de psicólogos, limitações do regime de meio período e sobrecarga burocrática limitam sua eficácia. Conclui-se ser urgente reestruturar a função, reduzir entraves administrativos e implementar o tempo integral.

Palavras-chave: educação do campo, governança educacional, cuidado em saúde mental, gestão de conflitos, orientação educacional.

“Escuchando a todos”: Gobernanza de orientadores escolares, salud mental y cambios en la educación familiar en escuelas de la Amazonía

RESUMEN. La educación rural en la Amazonía enfrenta desafíos únicos en el apoyo a la salud mental, agravados por transformaciones estructurales en la educación familiar. Este estudio de caso cualitativo investiga cómo los orientadores educativos en una escuela secundaria rural de Roraima perciben y ejercen sus roles ante estos cambios domésticos. Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a orientadores y profesores auxiliares (n=8). Los datos se procesaron mediante análisis de contenido y se organizaron en seis dimensiones: transformaciones familiares percibidas, efectos en los estudiantes, funciones del orientador, prácticas de cuidado, gobernanza educativa y barreras institucionales. Los resultados muestran una percepción de delegación de la socialización básica hacia la escuela, impulsada por la falta de tiempo de los padres debido a presiones económicas y el uso desregulado de tecnologías. En consecuencia, los estudiantes exhiben un declive en habilidades no cognitivas y sufrimiento emocional. Los orientadores responden mediante una matriz integrada donde la gobernanza educativa es el eje central, complementada por la gestión de conflictos y prácticas de cuidado. Sin embargo, barreras como la falta de psicólogos, el régimen de media jornada y la sobrecarga burocrática limitan su eficacia. Se concluye la urgencia de reestructurar el rol, reducir la burocracia e implementar la jornada completa.

Palabras clave: educación rural, gobernanza educativa, salud mental, gestión de conflictos, orientación educativa.

Introduction

In Brazil, education is framed as a collective effort to integrate individuals into a community—a threefold collaboration between the school, society, and the family (Brazilian Constitution, art. 205). It encompasses cognitive learning, socio-emotional skills and critical thinking for the students’ holistic development (Thomé & Wruck-Timm, 2025). This is particularly urgent in rural Amazonian schools, where systemic invisibility and resource scarcity have created gaps in support for youth well-being, as rural students face similar mental health issues as their urban peers but have less access to structured care, intersectoral support, and policies adapted to local realities (Signorini et al., 2024; Eiraldi et al., 2023).

In both urban and rural contexts, care starts with families, designated as the “first educators”. They are responsible for initial socialization, emotional care, and the cultivation of non-cognitive skills (e.g., empathy, self-regulation, conflict resolution), and shape citizen formation (Zhao, 2023; Guo & Chen, 2023). Family education (FE), the educational processes that occur within families and have life-long effects (Gómez-Navas, 2025), is thus a pillar of mental health. Families have been studied as a research object in education, as an educational environment that has its specific educational processes, since the 1970s (Gómez-Navas, 2025). Their variables (e.g., spaces, practices, attitudes, and interactions) directly affect child development (Gómez-Navas, 2025).

However, families are increasingly unable to fulfill these responsibilities (Chen, 2024; Rosa & Felipe, 2023), especially in marginalized contexts, due to socioeconomic pressures (Gartu, 2017). More demanding occupations for parents, the excessive use of technologies such as smartphones, and a lack of trust within communities have affected development of non-cognitive skills and mental health issues (Haidt, 2024). In this study, “non-cognitive skills” refer to emotional competencies (e.g., empathy, self-control), social competencies (e.g., conflict resolution), and moral competencies (e.g., respect, responsibility), fundamental for citizen formation and often neglected in formal education (Haidt, 2024).

These changes are inserted in a broader socioeconomic context. Apple (2003) points out how the simultaneous rise of four social sectors to power (neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists, and the new middle class) created a breeding ground for neoliberalism. In this form of capitalism, perceptions of a declining quality of life lead to the encroachment of efficiency standards upon the private sphere. Simultaneously, Adorno discusses how art is coopted by capitalism to become devoid of its original meaning, now reframed as pure

entertainment (semiculture), in order to establish hegemonic social cohesion and suppress criticism of the system (Freitag, 1986). Haidt (2024) and Gioia (2024) demonstrate how such phenomenon was exacerbated by neoliberalism. Television evolved into a “more portable, personalized and involving” technology (Haidt, 2024, p.8), and parents overwhelmed with work relied on those devices to raise their children, even though research on their long-term effects on non-cognitive skills development is still scarce. Since the 1980s, society has experienced increasing individualization, when communities gradually ceased to play central roles in child development (Haidt, 2024). New technologies exacerbate the trend.

Presently, with new technologies available, some parents, particularly for adolescents, envision their role as limited to providing material needs, regarding education as the schools’ responsibility (Su, 2024). This might lead to deficits in empathy, relationship development, communication skills, and mental well-being (Zhao, 2023; Zhu et al., 2019), perpetuating cycles of material and emotional poverty (Guo & Chen, 2023). Development of such skills is essential to the formation of citizens (Dong, 2012), so it is essential to re-emphasize education as a combined effort from family, school and society (Bi, 2024; Bi & Ren, 2023).

As a crucial space for children socialization, producing experiences where knowledge about life is reached (Signorini et al., 2024), schools are uniquely positioned to lead a response. Research shows caring schools can reduce negative impacts of a changing FE (Zhao, 2023)-schools become a “happy home”, leading to holistic development (Wang, 2012). Teachers’ emotional support and positive feedback leads to higher compassion, empathy, and prosocial behavior, especially among marginalized children (Poulou & Denham, 2022; Wu et al., 2023). Also, children with insufficient FE crave more care from school (Wang, 2018); and teacher emotional support influences both academic development and life adjustment (Peng et al., 2025). Such findings suggest care can be a significant pedagogical tool.

In Brazil, the post-COVID landscape amplified awareness of this change in FE (Winter, 2022), and research on how schools respond became essential. Communication between schools and families, however, is frequently ruptured, occurring whenever one party fails to recognize the other party, accompanied by judgement and punishment (Ministério da Educação, 2023). This process of violence can originate within schools, which often hold parents accountable for students’ problems, and use such judgement as justification for their own insufficient institutional intervention (Vinha, 2016). As reported by Maciel & Camargo (2024) in rural marginalized regions of Roraima, families can also impact communication by resisting

to coming to school and fulfilling educational responsibilities. However, studies exploring the problem are still scarce, particularly in Roraima and in the Amazon region.

The historical and sociopolitical context of Roraima exacerbates the current situation of rural education: a territory of “multiple frontiers: geographical, linguistic, ethnic, cultural and symbolic” (Camargo, 2016, p. 14), marked “by the dynamics of the world-economy to which it was subjected and by the disputes over the attempt to control the territory” (Camargo, 2016, p.59). Such frontiers are places of colonization and dehumanization: in a territory perceived as ‘empty’ forest, marginalized groups excluded by the hegemonic nation project migrated in successive waves and interacted with the local traditions, often in a dispute for resources (Camargo, 2016). Such “restrictive factors and repressive postures” hinder fulfillment of social rights in rural education (Oliveira, 2021, p. 113).

In the state of Roraima, rural education was formally introduced since the National Education Program for Agrarian Reform (PRONERA) in 1998. This program enabled “children of rural workers in the state of Roraima” to “receive access to training courses for rural teachers” (Oliveira, 2021, p.61), which helps break the dominant paradigm (Maciel, 2025). Vasconcelos et al. (2025) point to a deliberate precarization and invisibilization of the model in Roraima. Due to resource scarcity, it largely operates under the half-day school model (4-5 hours of schooling daily), posing a barrier to holistic development (Maciel, 2025). The current study follows the classical definition of rural education of Caldart (2012):

Rural Education refers to a phenomenon in contemporary Brazilian reality, led by rural workers and their organizations. It aims to influence educational policies based on the social interests of rural communities. Its objectives and participants relate to rural people's labor, culture, knowledge and social struggles, as well as the (class) conflicts between different agricultural models and rationales. These conflicts have implications for national and social development blueprints, along with the conceptions of public policy, education and human development (p.259, translated).

To address this contextualized issue, an ecological perspective insists that support for children with insufficient parental care requires a combined effort from family, school and society (Bi & Ren, 2023); as stated by the Constitution. School counselors (in Brazil, “Orientadores educacionais”, SCs) are school-institutionalized staff responsible for connecting family and school, and offering targeted student support (Freitas & Leal, 2023). SCs are on the frontline of institutional care for students, establishing dialogue between families and school (Freitas & Leal, 2023; Moreira, 2024), and are hence hypothesized to be key agents in this matter. Their study can reveal emergent solutions and inform training and policies, enhancing

care for vulnerable children. Still, while research on teacher care is ample, SCs are understudied, especially their strategies to deal with the perceived change in FE.

In Brazil, school counseling began in the 1930s referencing other countries; being regularized by the Ministry of Education in 1958 (Balbinot, 2023). Counseling began aiming for individual psychological care, evolving to comprehend broader aspects of education and connect individuals, the school and the surrounding community; since SCs establish supportive networks of care alongside families, social workers and psychologists (Balbinot, 2023). This description contrasts with school professionals that use care in their work, but are socially expected to primarily perform other functions (e.g., teaching).

This research is an exploratory, qualitative case study of the emerging phenomenon of an alteration in FE, aiming to identify SCs' perception—whether they identify it, whether they have strategies for responding, and whether they balance care practices with (re)connecting school, family and society. It investigates one high school from a marginalized rural education context in the Amazon, guiding the research question: “How do school counselors perceive, assess, and rationalize their role as mental health caregivers in a context of a changing FE?”

This study responds to the call for research on rural mental health, centering on rural Amazonian educational communities. The choice of Brazil as a research context is justified by an alteration in FE being perceived as occurring since before the pandemic, when global awareness started to rise (Winter, 2022), and by the lack of academic studies on the topic. SCs are traditionally considered not to be care providers, with a focus on identifying and reporting “serious” problems to authorities (Moreira, 2024). Nevertheless, SCs are part of the schools' mental health staff (Eiraldi et al., 2023), being the main and most consistent manifestation of school-based mental health support. Consequently, research on how SC deal with issues perceived as “less serious”—that do not require to be reported and must be addressed within the school, such as changes in FE and everyday mental health problems—remains scarce. Likewise, such problems might be connected to issues regarded as “serious”. Accordingly, the SC need to be further studied and systematized in the current context.

Brazilian states within the Amazon Rain Forest rank among the lowest in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB). Roraima's high schools, in particular, have the lowest index (3,5/10), the lowest student flow rate (0,83/1), and the second-lowest learning rate (4,24/10) (IDEB, 2024), suggesting a need for research, especially in rural schools. Also, in the Brazilian Amazon, child neglect and abuse are among the highest in the country, with

consequences in both cognitive and non-cognitive development (Moreira, 2024). The author places schools as crucial institutions for identifying problems and establishing dialogue between families and students; yet SCs, who mainly report such cases, are under researched.

Additionally, schools rarely appear in literature as centers of care and understanding, with a focus on identifying and reporting problems (Moreira, 2024). Similarly, little is known about “feasible and appropriate” care strategies for rural school contexts (Eiraldi et al., 2023). Studying how rural schools’ SCs identify, report and respond to issues, is therefore of central importance, with SCs’ perception and interventions not yet empirically studied in Roraima.

Theoretical framework

This section aims to understand how literature perceives a change in the FE, and select two main theoretical frameworks (Care Practices and Educational Governance) to hypothetically frame current practices of the analyzed SCs. The theoretical framework was selected based on the specific characteristics of SCs’ work, as described in the introduction. Lastly, the section proposes a preliminary version of a conceptual framework, articulating both theories in an attempt to frame the phenomenon and SCs possible responses.

Transformations in Family Education and school counseling

Literature review was conducted to understand which factors may be contributing to the phenomenon of a change in FE, especially in rural contexts. A search in Brazil returned only three results (none linking the phenomenon to rural education); therefore, it was also conducted internationallyⁱ. In China, recent research expanded from investigating insufficient FE among specific groups, like “left-behind” children (Peng et al., 2025). This is a focus of classic studies (Zhou et al., 2005), which analyze parents focusing on academic performance while neglecting other holistic development (Ping, 2024). There is relatively abundant literature on support teachers and school offer for “left-behind” children when insufficient FE is observed (Peng et al., 2025, Guo & Chen, 2023). Yet, research providing a more general approach is still scarce, and school support is considered as a means to academic results (Peng et al., 2025). Meanwhile, other aspects of a changing FE remain underexplored.

In other countries, other factors, external to families, may have contributed to alterations in FE. As pointed in the introduction, some families might be using technologies (e.g., smartphones) as a means of education. Still, research shows smartphones use strategies akin to

drugs in order to get users addicted, with especially negative effects the younger the person is (Gioia, 2024; Haidt, 2024). As people's attention becomes increasingly perceived as a product, the issue worsened, with 2010-2015 and the pandemic years (2020-2022) as pivotal points for the construction of its hegemony (Haidt, 2024). Different offerings from cellphones (social media, pornography, online gaming) cause severe ruptures in the development of non-cognitive skills and socialization (Haidt, 2024). As pointed by the author, they

target children in vulnerable stages of development, when their brains were rapidly reconfiguring in response to stimuli ... By developing an unrestricted, real-time flow of addictive content that entered through children's eyes and ears, and by replacing the physical aspect of socialization, these companies reconfigured childhood and transformed human development on an almost unimaginable scale (p.9).

These factors have increased impact in marginalized contexts, including rural education in the Amazon (Maciel, 2025). The author further indicates families and schools in Indigenous contexts perceive excessive use of smartphones as a serious educational crisis.

Recent Brazilian research in SCs and family education also points to the challenges SC face in articulating families, school and community, especially during and after COVID, with results pointing to the potential of affectivity as a way to guide the work of SC (Moysés, 2024). Balbinot (2023), in a SC literature review, reports the main themes include the relationship between family and school, the participation of the family in the educational processes, the school educating families, conflict mediation, among others. However, most of the works is not available online, and none is from after 2020—hence, possible effects of the pandemic are not captured. Balbinot's (2023) research show SCs have a clear understanding of their roles, but "superficiality in society" inhibits their work. The author describes it as an "immediate-oriented society governed by the logic of performance and competition" (p.109).

In this sense, despite not exploring exclusively FE, and not in the Amazon context, the author predates the present study in exploring how the work of SCs may have been affected in recent years, inviting research. The last recent relevant research on SCs found in literature is that of Alves (2024) reports SC also deals with the teachers, who report a lack of attention paid to educators, excessive workload, personal issues, and pressure to deliver results.

Excluding China, recent international research in family education and SC include: (1) the influence of lower ratios of SC to dropout rates and study achievement (Brown & Knight, 2023), (2) how Appalachian high SC address career and college readiness (Ault et al., 2024), (3) how the Transforming School Counseling Initiative encourages equity, leadership, and

systemic change (Gilfillan et al., 2026), (4) how SC needs pre-service and in-training service post-COVID to better attend the community (Alfonso et al., 2024), among others, with no direct relation to the present study. Yet, Alfonso et al. (2024) puts forward the possibility that the pandemic might intensify and alter the demand for SCs.

Educational governance

The Brazilian Constitution (art.205) understands that education is a joint responsibility between society, schools, and families: “Education, which is the right of all people and the duty of the State and families, shall be promoted and encouraged with the participation of society, aiming at the full development of individuals, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and their professional competence for work”. After international literature review, the concept of educational governance is understood to translate this responsibility into a cohesive theory. In fact, in many of the Chinese authors consulted for the literature review, the term is emphasized as part of the solution for complex educational problems.

Collaborative governance (Bi, 2024) is the process of diverse social subjects forming a common understanding by equal coordination and discussion to collectively manage public affairs and well-being (Li et al., 2024). It originated in the 1990s from research on synergetics (Bi, 2024), a continuous process reconciling different interests. It enables conjunct action (Huang & Zhang, 2015) to form a harmonious, systematic, and efficient network (Zhu, 2010) where stakeholders assume collective responsibility (Tian, 2014). For education research, the specific term “educational governance” was coined: “state institutions, social organizations, interest groups, and citizens, jointly manage educational affairs through democratic consultation and interaction” (Liu et al., 2019, p. 58). It aims not only to improve formal education, but education as a whole, for “only when school education, family education, and social education overlap and influence each other can the effect of holistic education be achieved, jointly promoting the all-round development of the student” (Gu et al., 2022, p.10).

This theory was chosen to conceptualize how transformations in FE can be approached through collective accountability (e.g., SCs, teachers, principals, parents, law enforcement, social welfare institutions, and academia), where public and private spheres blur boundaries to avoid fragmented care. Literature illustrates the necessity of educational governance as a response to the phenomenon, encompassing society, school and family as essential realms that collaborate to holistic education (Cheng, 2024; Mai, 2025); which concurs with the Brazilian

Constitution. In this research, “educational governance” refers to education being a collaboration between families, schools, communities, and the broader society.

Care Practices

Care is a vital practice for human development, enabling the protection and reproduction of communities founded in solidarity through the use of emotion and affection in interpersonal relationships (Silva & Rojas, 2024). The authors conceptualize care based on five elements: (1) attending to the needs of others for whom we are responsible, (2) valuing emotion as a tool to navigate morality, (3) rejecting abstract reasoning for moral problems, (4) focusing on specific cases, and (5) reconceptualizing notions of public and private spheres. Care practices include actions following such guidelines, under the Theory of Ethics of Care.

Those practices may have developed new, understudied dimensions in schools to complement a perceived change in FE; which remains to be proven by research. The concept also draws from the Attachment Theory from social work, emphasizing the importance of children having access to familiar, stable, non-abusive, family-based care (Foster et al., 2025). However, Chaudhary & Dhar (2023) proposes that the significance of others and the presence

... of multiple caregivers is a key distinction between what is perceived as a context for healthy development in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) countries and the reality of childcare in the majority world. (n.p.)

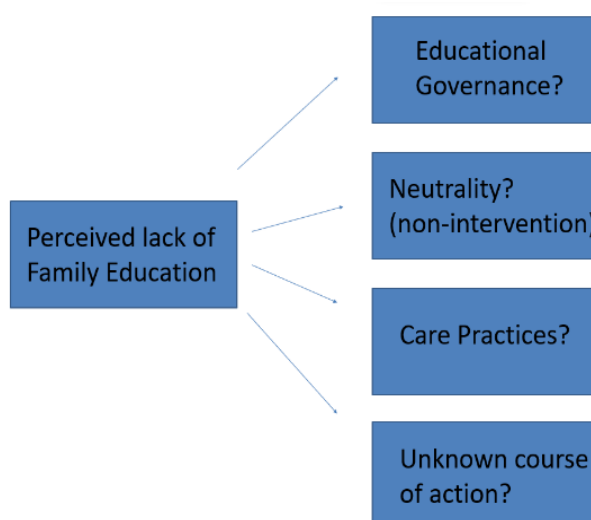
Therefore, healthy emotional development of a child throughout their lives is not “determined by a singular, exclusive, responsive, predictable caregiver” (n.p.), as it would be in the context of traditional Attachment Theory. This research approaches attachment from the perspective of Chaudhary & Dhar (2023), as a means to understand the work of the SC. SCs share functions with social workers, especially in caring and connecting school, student, and family (Erwin & Frey, 2023). Such understanding of care share connections with Educational Governance and the Brazilian Constitution’ understanding of education.

This perspective underlines the multiple institutions, areas and professionals involved in education; many of whom possibly have SCs as a connection point. Attachment is also found in education as a similar concept—the ability children need to develop to identify and regulate emotions, get along, empathize, and solve problems with others. This is done through close, connected relationships with a multiple number of adults (Erwin & Frey, 2023).

Interpretative models

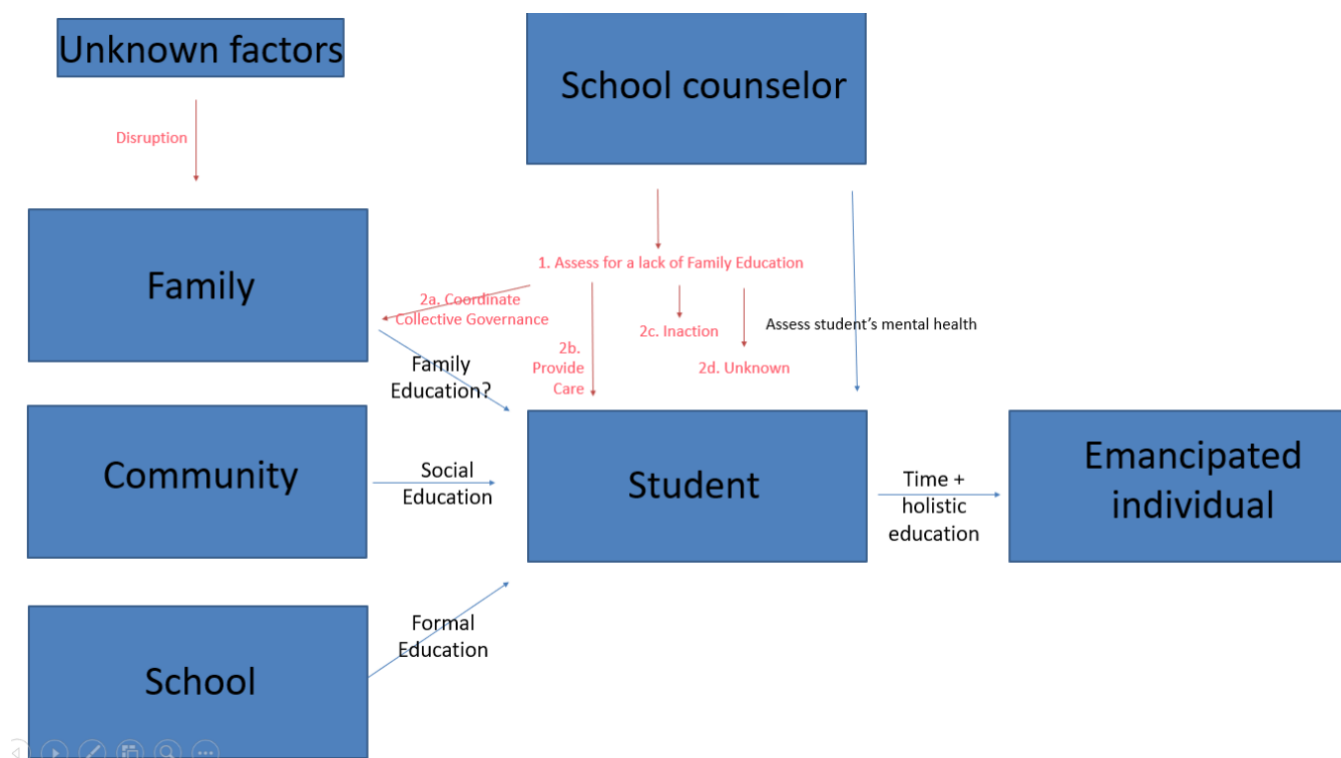
Care ethics (Silva & Rojas, 2024) and educational governance (Liu et al., 2019) form an integrated framework for the rural schools' SC. Governance (re)builds the school-family-community collaboration network, and care provides the emotional basis for this network to function in the marginalized context of the Amazon. While facing a change in FE, SCs are hypothesized to respond with: non-intervention, providing care, or attempting to reconnect families, responsibilities, the school and the student. Figures 1 and 2 attempt to translate such hypothesis into interpretative models. The “unknown factors” noted in Figure 2 refer to factors that do not explicitly appear in literature, but may affect education. In Figure 2, blue arrows symbolize regular occurrences, and pink arrows symbolize recent developments, when transformations in FE became more visible. The discussion conducted highlights the need to research the interface between educational governance, care practices, and the transformation of FE, especially in Amazonian Rural Education, guiding the present research.

Figure 1 - Hypothesis of how SCs respond to the problem of a change in FE



Note: Elaborated by the author as an interpretative model derived from the theory.

Figure 2 - Hypothesis on how a changing FE affects education, and how SCs might respond.



Note: Elaborated by the author as an interpretative model derived from the theory.

Methodology

This study employed an exploratory, qualitative case study design, conducted in a rural high school. This level was selected because all learners have reached Piaget's formal operational thinking stage (McLeod, 2024). This allows for a more uniform manifestation of the phenomenon and response strategies, which is ideal for an early exploratory approach.

The case is a rural high-school in a city in the state of Roraima, with morning and afternoon shifts. The school operates on a half-day school schedule with no on-site school psychologist or dedicated mental health staff. It serves around 800 students, from which *circa* 300 live outside of the urban perimeter (in Portuguese, "vicinais"). Such students come to the school daily using public transportation provided by the federal government (Programa Caminho da Escola), spending from 40 minutes to more than two hours in the way to school.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with SCs and auxiliary teachers (n=4 each, 2 per shift), conducted in Portuguese, in February, 2026, in a private room at the school, to ensure comfort and confidentiality. The inclusion of auxiliary teachers specialized in special needs students is justified for they accompany a single classroom for a

whole year; in a system akin to the homeroom teacher in other countries. They directly deal with students' mental health issues through dialogue, propose activities in their free time, and have regular contact with SCs. It also allows for triangulation of the data collected from SCs.

This sample was selected purposively, as all participants hold frontline roles mediating family-school relations and addressing student mental health needs, consistent with the study's focus. All participants (I1-I8) had over 20 years of experience in rural education, were within five years from retirement, and were not native to the municipality; seven identified as women, six were married, one was widowed, and one was divorced.

As for participant selection, all four of the SCs actively working in the school were included (no exclusion criteria). Regarding auxiliary teachers, the inclusion criteria was: (1) is currently working in a fixed classroom for the academic year, (2) has constant interactions with the SCs (at least once a week), (3) has at least 20 years of experience in rural education, (4) have free time in the days the researcher was available in order to conduct interviews.

All participants provided written consent via a detailed Informed Consent Form (ICF), which outlined the study's objectives, their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and protocols for data anonymization and confidentiality. All identifying details (school name, participant names, municipality) have been removed from the manuscript. Interviews were recorded in audio and later transcribed *ipsis literis*. The research's ethical procedures were reviewed and authorized by the Faculty of Education in Southwest University (FoE, SWU).

The interview protocol included 13 open-ended questions, aiming to collect SCs personal professional perspectives, including their views on FE, the SCs career, possible changes in FE and possible impacts in their work and in other forms of education, and the framework selected (Care Practices, Educational Governance). All interviews were conducted in February, 2026, with the duration ranging from 12 minutes (shortest interview) and 56 minutes (longest). The different ranges reflect different individual tendencies toward their own elaboration of their narrative. The semi-structured approach allowed for a prioritization of active listening, where standard prompts were followed by probing questions in subjects that particularly interested the interviewees and in points that were not fully covered by them. Points from later questions that were already covered were also identified and eliminated. The interviews were analyzed using content analysis (Bardin, 2020), which demands three phases.

In the first phase (pre-analysis), formal organization of the text was conducted. The entire transcript was read multiple times to develop a holistic, inductive familiarity. In this

stage, the corpus was verified for completeness, linguistic clarity, and relevance to the central question. The second phase (exploration of the material), included a more systematic coding operation. The text was broken down into operational units of meaning, defined semantically as distinct sentences. An initial round of open coding assigned conceptual labels to these text fragments, and through constant comparative analysis these codes were grouped for similarities. The third and final phase involved the construction of analytical categories through a combined inductive-deductive matrix. Category organization followed internal and external homogeneity principles, in order for the categories to share a singular conceptual core and for the boundaries between categories to be mutually exclusive and distinct.

The content analysis identified seven interconnected themes, all tied to the study's focus on school counselors' role amid transforming FE and its impacts on student mental health. In order to guarantee that the study's inferences reflect the explicit experiences of the participants, each emergent category is illustrated with verbatim participant quotes, translated from the original Portuguese, with participants identified via anonymized codes (I1-I8). The raw audio recordings and unmasked transcription text are securely stored within password-protected offline digital repositories accessible solely to the researchers, and are scheduled for permanent destruction upon the formal conclusion of the project.

Qualitative case studies do not aim for statistic generalization, so thick description was used instead in order to describe the context in detail. This allows future research to assess the applicability of such localized findings to structurally analogous rural settings.

Results

The qualitative content analysis of the interview corpus allowed for the systematization of the participants' accounts into six fundamental analytical dimensions.

Perceived transformations in Family Education

Participants from both professional roles (SCs, auxiliary teachers) identified structural changes within FE. The primary transformation observed is a progressive delegation of socialization, behavioral boundary-setting, and moral development from the domestic sphere to the school environment. Data indicate that this is due to families facing increasing difficulties in executing FE: "The family is the foundation where values, attitudes, and behaviors that directly influence school learning are built ... Parents have specific responsibilities, such as

monitoring school life, encouraging studies, setting limits ... but many ... delegate ... basic responsibilities to the school” (I1), “What we generally see today is families delegating all responsibility to the school ...]Basic education, such as respect, social rules, etc., falls largely on the school.” (I2), “Families end up shifting all this responsibility to school institutions” (I3).

According to the participants, this is not an isolated phenomenon or an individual choice from the family to abandon their duties. It is directly linked to macro-economic pressures and the precarity of time that affect this rural society, named by some participants as “capitalism”. For instance, the necessity of expanding working hours results in prolonged parental physical absence from the home: “Many parents work outside the home all day and are absent from home for long periods... basic education falls largely on the school.” (I2), “I think [the cause] it’s the capitalist world. The cost of living means a single family member can’t support the household. Both parents have to work to make ends meet.” (I3), “Today we live in a capitalist society, right? And this causes parents to distance themselves from their own commitment and responsibility...” (I5).

The school is not the only one to bear the weight for the changes. Due to the contraction of parental presence and domestic time, digital tools (such as smartphones) are being used as surrogates for education, and have played a central role in socialization. Interviewees also noted that lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic did not originate these transformations - they accelerated pre-existing factors, making technological dependency and a further reliance on school more visible when face-to-face classes resumed: “COVID-19 had a significant impact. ... During the pandemic, parents had to take on a more active role mediating home learning and dealing with emotional and pedagogical challenges ... Students currently do not have ... the same profile as students before COVID-19” (I1), “When the boys came back [after the pandemic], they were unusual, unwell students, because they’d spent so much time indoors talking to who knows who ... the father is home, the mother is home, but the boy is elsewhere, browsing the internet” (I5).

Perceived effects on students

The consequences manifest directly in the behaviors, psychological development, and mental health of students within the school. Interviewees report a noticeable regression in students’ non-cognitive skills, particularly regarding self-regulation, empathy, interpersonal respect, and adherence to social rules. Smartphone continuous use was identified as a driver of

psychological isolation and cognitive displacement, locking adolescents into what professionals describe as an illusory reality: “Young people, due to lack of maturity to use technology for their benefit, only use [cellphones] for social media, cannot filter information ... instead of cognitive learning evolution, there is a regression.” (I3), “Technology shortens distances, shortens everything, including access to criminality ... If you get too attached to the screen, you stop living your own world, society ... It’s a false life, an illusion.” (I4), “... the issue of cellphones, the issue of coexistence, right? Coexistence isn’t what it used to be. So much conflict, right? And this ends up interfering with students’ learning” (I8).

The data reveal that this impacts not only formal learning. In fact, the research subjects report students’ emotional suffering as having worsened following the return to the physical classroom. “They [the students] spent two years without socializing, only having social media. This had an impact on their social, emotional, and learning development” (I3), “parents [are] failing to set boundaries, to enforce responsibility and organization... leading to emotional issues, many times resulting in illnesses like depression and anxiety” (I2); “[there is a] lack of boundaries, lack of family support ... directly interfering not only with learning but also with classroom indiscipline” (I3); “value education is the parents’ responsibility... values, I believe, are things like respect, saying ‘excuse me,’ ‘good afternoon,’ ‘sorry’” (I5).

Functions attributed to school counselors

SCs define their professional identity through three interconnected practices: educational governance, care practices, and conflict management. Conflict management emerges as the center of everyday practices, requiring a holistic approach to resolve tensions within the community and school: “Conflict management ... encompasses everything. You’ll be listening to everyone—the family, the student, the teacher, the counselor, the manager, the coordination team... to resolve a conflict, you have to see the whole picture.” (I8)

The data show that behavioral or disciplinary problems are not treated in isolation. SCs utilize these issues as diagnostic entry points to map the student’s FE environment, with the ultimate goal of (re)integrating parents and family to their original education functions. “The number of students and the time we have to interact with them is insufficient ... Family neglect is so great that they do not respond to the school’s calls” (I2); “Parents don’t attend meetings. ... They know what their child is like, so they say ‘If I go to the school meeting, they’ll scold me, I won’t go” (I5)

Care Practices

Care practices represent the relational, affective, and welcoming dimension of the counselors' daily routines. In the absence of specialized institutional mental health resources on the school, care is operationalized through active, sensitive listening and non-punitive dialogue: "The educational counselor [uses] ... sensitive listening, combined with the ability to guide, welcome, and promote dialogue." (I1).

SCs emphasize that offering targeted emotional support is an important tool to mitigate crises. In this sense, SCs' care practice can be understood as a tool in order to achieve the greater goal of conflict management. This reaffirms SCs identity as an agent of educational governance, coordinating actions from school, society, and family. Care also serves to preserve a psychological baseline for students to remain engaged in learning.

Educational Governance

Educational governance constitutes the central operational axis and the most heavily emphasized function within the corpus. It is described as the counselor's capacity to mobilize and connect the various stakeholders within the student's educational ecosystem, and offering tools for these different parties to align views. This includes teachers, administrators, families, and external public support structures, and ensures collective accountability: "Counseling boils down to this: connecting those involved." (I6).

If a lack of FE or a lack of engagement in school affairs is perceived, SCs call families back to their educational duties, demanding active participation in children's development. Furthermore, due to a perceived resource scarcity within the institution, the governance role extends beyond the physical school walls. SCs mediate the process, demand interventions from external social protection and public mental health networks to address vulnerabilities that exceed the school's internal jurisdiction. Some public institutions cited as important care centers are: Centro de Referência Especializado de Assistência Social - CREAS (Specialized Social Assistance Reference Center; 10 citations by the interviewees), Conselho Tutelar (Tutelar Council; 8 citations), Ministério Público (Public Prosecutor's Office; 4 citations). Neither the Centro de Assistência Psicossocial (CAPS, Psychosocial Care Center) nor school psychologists were cited.

Institutional Barriers

The final dimension maps structural and institutional obstacles that constrain the efficacy of the SCs' governance and care interventions within this rural Amazonian context. Three primary barriers emerged from the data: absence of on-site school psychologists and social workers (I3, I4, I8), temporal restrictions (half-day school shift in this rural context) (I2, I7), and an excess of a demand for bureaucratic work (I4, I7, I8).

The first factor force SCs and, sometimes, auxiliary teachers, to absorb the role of dealing with mental health issues, despite lacking clinical training. The second factor restricts face-to-face interaction with students to four to five hours a day, and may contribute for the institution to prioritize cognitive learning. The third factor turns the limited hours of the SC's work day focused on filing paperwork and compliance reporting, creating a bureaucratic burden that limits their ability to function as holistic educational managers: "Counseling is only doing bureaucratic work ... saying things like, 'look, parent, your child is being difficult'; call the council [Tutelary Council] ... What's missing is a more systematic approach to guidance" (I7).

Discussion

Theoretical interpretation of FE transformation

A crescent delegation of educational socialization from the family to the school, as described in the results, can be interpreted through the structural socioeconomic changes. The intense economic demands noted by participants force parents to extend their working hours. This aligns with Apple (2003) on how neoliberal economic standards intrude upon the private sphere. Families experience a fragmentation of their role, as the primary educators responsible for socialization and non-cognitive cultivation (Gómez-Navas, 2025; Zhao, 2023).

These functions are increasingly filled by digital technology (in the form of the smartphone), which acts as an unmonitored surrogate caregiver. Participants' observations of emotional detachment and a lack of non-cognitive development as exhibited by students' behavior mirror the theoretical arguments of Haidt (2024) and Gioia (2024). Thus, in contexts where community-based common spaces are scarce, the virtual sphere becomes the venue for socialization, which may interfere in empathy, self-regulation, and moral values development.

Moreover, the consensus that the pandemic merely exposed and reinforced these transformations reflects Winter's (2022) analysis in other Brazilian contexts. Remote learning

accelerated reliance on such digital surrogates and deepened social isolation, and these pre-existing factors started manifesting as demands for the SC in the post-pandemic classroom.

The findings point SC (non-psychologists) as frontline school mental health providers, but their work is constrained by bureaucracy, half-day schooling, and challenges in building partnerships with parents who hold different perspectives on FE, have little time etc. This aligns with Signorini et al. (2024)'s argument that rural school psychology and care work is systematically invisibilized, under-resourced, and omitted from mental health policy/research.

Reconceptualizing school counseling through governance and care

The integration of the Ethics of Care (Silva & Rojas, 2024) and Educational Governance (Liu et al., 2019) provided a conceptual lens to understand SCs' role in this context. Data show that their original role of providing individual assistance and connecting different sectors through conflict mediation (Balbinot, 2023; Freitas & Leal, 2023) is being intensified, at the same time that a demand for bureaucratic work is rising and obstructing their role. Both theories are complementary, as, without governance, localized care practices risk becoming individualized and disconnected. Chaudhary & Dhar (2023) would describe this as non-ideal for non-WEIRD societies, who do not rely on single caring figures, but are distributed across multiple institutions and communal caregivers. Without a foundation of care, governance is devoid of empathy, becoming part of the bureaucracy.

In this perspective, by positioning themselves as coordinators who link families, teachers, and others, SCs act as potential "central managers" of a collective ecosystem of care, confirming schools can operate as spaces of holistic development (Poulou & Denham, 2022).

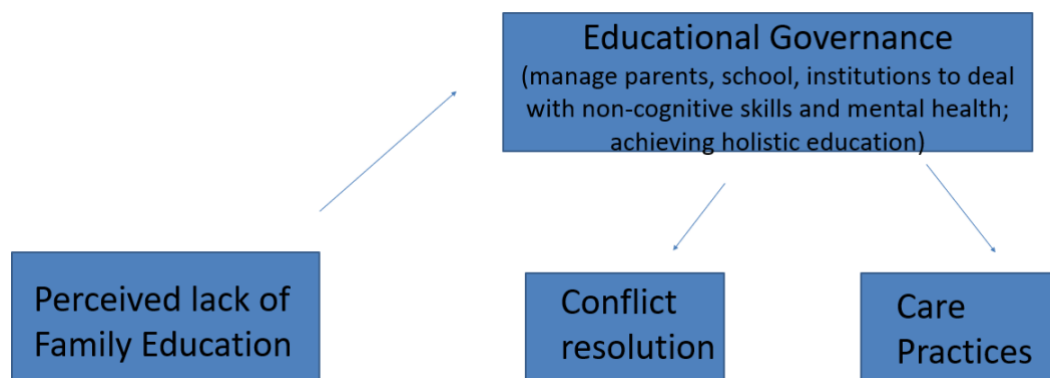
Conflict management serves as the intersection where governance and care meet, solving disputes by viewing the "whole picture" (I8) and re-establishing relational networks.

Assessment of previous interpretive models

The hypothesized interpretative models (Figures 1 and 2) need to be adapted to the rural reality encountered, as educational governance appears as the center, with conflict management and care as tools. Figures 3 & 4 attempt to address previously unknown factors. They are not demonstrated causal schemes, but interpretative models that reflect the localized and subjective data. SC's main objective remains to achieve educational governance, alleged to allow SCs to manage efforts from family education, social education, and formal education (2a – 2c), while

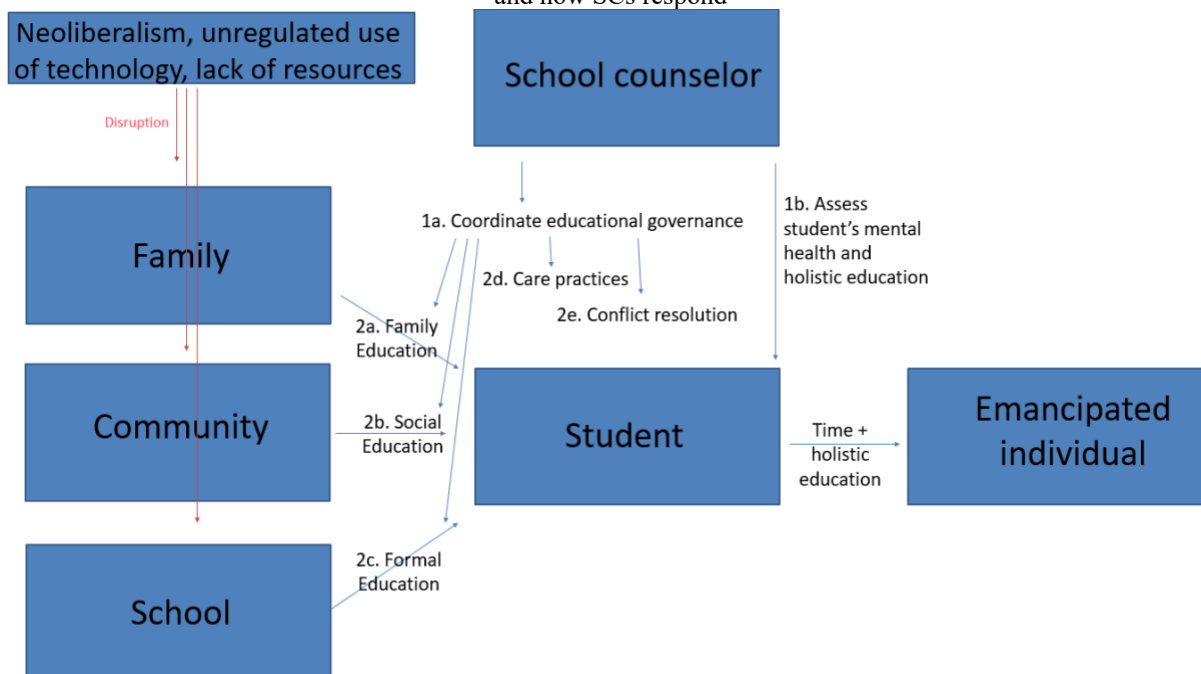
still providing care practices (2d) and applying conflict resolution techniques with the different actors involved (2e). Therefore, the study found SCs perceive to have two main functions (collective governance and assess students' holistic education and their mental health), connecting relevant actors for each of the conflict's resolution. Further research can further refine the models and develop them into fully demonstrated causal schemes.

Figure 3 - Interpretative Model of How SCs Respond to the Problem of a Change in FE



Note: Elaborated by the author. It is an interpretation derived from the corpus.

Figure 4 - Interpretative model of the recent changes in family, schools, community; how it affects education; and how SCs respond



Note: Elaborated by the author. It is an interpretation derived from the corpus.

Implications for educational policy and practice

Local SCs' perception highlights possible pathways for educational policy reform in rural Roraima. First, addressing the perceived deficiency in non-cognitive development requires a transition toward full-day integral education models. Following the corpus, expansion in this context would be essential to provide the necessary time and space for systematic socio-emotional cultivation, in a context where families may not be able to fully provide the necessary development of non-cognitive skills.

The perceived FE changes suggest families may not be able to fully attend to their functions. This would require not only re(stablishing) each family with their duties, but also further training of SCs, teachers, school staff, and parents, promoting a greater understanding of educational governance, care, empathy, and non-cognitive skills development.

Third, data suggests a need to systematize care and educational governance as part of the professional duties of rural SCs in the state, balancing administrative and bureaucratic paperwork. This would allow for more governance and student-centered care practices.

Finally, the school cannot act in isolation to solve complex such psychosocial issues. While most SCs reported reaching out to other institutions, the lack of mentions to CAPS and the lack of psychologists in the school, for instance, suggests educational policies must prioritize the creation of intersectoral networks that link rural schools with public mental health infrastructures. This would ensure regular access and better distribute responsibilities.

Conclusion

This exploratory qualitative case study examined how school counselors in a marginalized rural high school in Roraima perceive and enact their role amidst perceived transformations in family education. The empirical findings indicate that participants observe a significant delegation of moral, emotional, and social educational responsibilities from families to the school. The interviewees attribute these factors to socioeconomic pressures on parents and unregulated use of digital technology. Such transformations are perceived to appear within the school as underdeveloped non-cognitive skills and emotional issues.

The interviewed SCs rationalize their professional identity in this new context primarily through educational governance. They view themselves as coordinators who apply care practices and conflict management for each issue, with the ultimate goal of (re) establishing relations between families, students, and educators. However, their capacity to foster holistic

development is inhibited by institutional barriers, including a half-day school schedule, bureaucratic workloads, and few specialized on-site mental health resources.

The principal limitation of this study resides in its single-case qualitative design and reliance on self-reported data within a specific frontier context. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to other rural settings. The study concludes that addressing youth well-being and non-cognitive development in rural Amazonian education cannot rely on isolated institutional efforts. It requires an institutionally supported network of governance that aligns the family, the school, and communities within a network of care.

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ⁱ Search conducted in December, 2025; in the databases: EBSCO, ProQuest, Web of Science, SciELO, CAPES, BDTD, RNRD, UFRD, UERR, Wiley, CNKI, Wanfang Data. Portuguese-language search strings: “orientador educacional*” AND (“função da família” OR “responsabilidade parental” OR “abandono educativo” OR “família-escola*” OR “coopera*”) AND (“cuidado” OR “suporte emocional” OR “acolhimento” OR “compensat*” AND “crianças em vulnerabilidade” OR “jovens rurais”). English-language search strings: (“school counselor” OR “counselor” OR “life-support teacher” OR “living teacher” OR “housemaster”) AND (“family education” OR “household education” OR “parent education” OR “parental education”).

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