




THE PRINCIPLE OF PARTICIPATION AND MATERIALIZATION IN MUNICIPAL
EDUCATION SYSTEMS: PERCEPTIONS OF MEMBERS OF MUNICIPAL
EDUCATION COUNCILS

O PRINCÍPIO DA PARTICIPAÇÃO E A MATERIALIZAÇÃO EM SISTEMAS MUNICIPAIS DE
ENSINO: PERCEPÇÕES DE MEMBROS DE CONSELHOS MUNICIPAIS DE EDUCAÇÃO

EL PRINCIPIO DE PARTICIPACIÓN Y LA MATERIALIZACIÓN EN SISTEMAS DE
EDUCACIÓN MUNICIPAL: PERCEPCIONES DE LOS MIEMBROS DE LOS CONSEJOS DE
EDUCACIÓN MUNICIPAL

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to: understand theoretical aspects about the democratic management of education associated with the perspective of democratization in the context of the autonomy of the municipal system; analyze the dynamics of participation, from the perception of members of Municipal Councils of Education, operated in the management of education in municipal systems of Piauí. The methodology adopted elements of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches; the data were collected from the application of a questionnaire. The population of 194 subjects corresponds to the sum of all councilors (97 teaching representatives and 97 representatives of civil society), considering that 97 is the number of municipalities with an education system, therefore with the Municipal Council of Education instituted. Only 14 municipalities participated in this research, thus adding 28 subjects / counselors (14 teaching representatives and 14 teaching representatives). The data indicate the main spaces for participation: Municipal Education Council and Municipal Education Conference; and the main mechanisms: Municipal Education Plan and Political-Pedagogical Project.

KEYWORDS: Management. Participation. Municipal education systems. Municipal Education Council.

RESUMO

Este estudo tem como objetivos: compreender aspectos teóricos acerca da gestão democrática do ensino associada à perspectiva de democratização no contexto da autonomia do sistema municipal; analisar as dinâmicas de participação, a partir da percepção de membros de Conselhos Municipais de Educação, operadas na gestão do ensino em sistemas municipais do Piauí. A metodologia adotou elementos tanto da abordagem quantitativa quanto da abordagem qualitativa; os dados foram coletados a partir da aplicação de questionário. A população de 194 sujeitos corresponde à soma de todos os conselheiros (97 representantes docentes e 97 representantes da sociedade civil), considerando que 97 é o número de municípios com sistema de ensino, logo com Conselho Municipal de Educação instituído. Nesta pesquisa participaram somente 14 municípios, somando, portanto, 28 sujeitos/conselheiros (14 representantes docentes e 14 representantes docentes). Os dados apontam os principais espaços de participação: Conselho Municipal de Educação e Conferência Municipal de Educação; e os principais mecanismos: Plano Municipal de Educação e Projeto Político-Pedagógico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gestão. Participação. Sistemas municipais de ensino. Conselho Municipal de Educação.



RESUMÉN

El objetivo de este estudio es: comprender los aspectos teóricos sobre la gestión democrática de la educación asociada con la perspectiva de la democratización en el contexto de la autonomía del sistema municipal; Analizar la dinámica de participación, desde la percepción de los miembros de los Consejos Municipales de Educación, operados en la gestión de la educación en los sistemas municipales de Piauí. La metodología adoptó elementos de los enfoques cuantitativos y cualitativos; Los datos se obtuvieron de la aplicación de un cuestionario. La población de 194 sujetos corresponde a la suma de todos los concejales (97 representantes docentes y 97 representantes de la sociedad civil), considerando que 97 es el número de municipios con un sistema educativo, por lo tanto, con el Consejo Municipal de Educación instituido. Solo 14 municipios participaron en esta investigación, agregando 28 sujetos/consejeros (14 representantes docentes y 14 representantes docentes). Los datos indican los principales espacios de participación: el Consejo Municipal de Educación y la Conferencia Municipal de Educación; y los principales mecanismos: Plan Municipal de Educación y Proyecto Político-Pedagógico.

PALAVRAS CLAVE: Gestión. Participación. Sistemas educativos municipales. Consejo Municipal de Educación.

INTRODUCTION

Once democratic management is effectively implemented through the spaces and mechanisms that make participation possible, it has a high probability of giving positive results within each system. We agree that it does not occur without the full participation of representatives of the organized civil society in decisions about educational policy, since, through participation, it is possible to advance in the democratization of education. Through participatory democracy, representatives of sectors of the society can consult, deliberate, regulate and supervise the actions of the educational system's executive body. For this reason, we can consider that participating in democratic management requires responsibility, commitment and knowledge of the causes of education.

To understand democracy and its real meaning, beyond the etymological sense, we need to analyze the concept of democratization, which implies making it possible for everyone to have the same opportunities, including participation. It is worth remembering, then, that democracy loses the power emanated from it to promote the emergence of decisions from the collective point of view, if there is not the full exercise of struggle and social mobility. Based on this understanding, this study has as its guiding point the following research question: how can we perceive the dynamics of participation in the materialization of public education management in municipal systems? To answer this question, we were guided by the following objectives: to understand theoretical aspects about the democratic education management associated with the perspective of democratization in the context of the autonomy of the municipal system; to analyze the dynamics of participation, from the perception of members of Municipal Education Councils, operated in the education management in municipal systems in Piauí.

The methodology adopted elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches of the research in education. The justification for adopting both approaches was the fact that the data survey instrument (questionnaire) was built from closed and open questions, enabling statistical analyses and content analyses.

We decided to combine the two approaches because we understand that both can contribute both to the statistical potentiality and to the potentiality of the content analysis, in addition to filling the particular deficiencies of each one.

The population comprises 194 members of the Municipal Education Council from 97 municipalities with an education system in the state of Piauí; the sample consisted of two (2) members of the Municipal Education Council from 14 municipalities (14.43%). The survey subjects total 28 counselors, 14 civil society representatives, and 14 teacher representatives. It is worth noting that the 97 municipalities with their own education system were asked to participate, for that matter they were contacted through an e-mail containing the questionnaires. Considering that in a survey the criterion of freedom should prevail over the others, the sample was composed of 14 municipalities, because these were the ones that answered the e-mail and returned the questionnaires answered to us.

The questionnaire was composed of five (5) questions (4 closed questions – 1st to 4th; 1 open question – 5th), in order to consider the following topics: i) respondent's data (time of experience in the Municipal Education Council, job linkage and professional training before or during working in the Municipal Education Council); ii) opportunities for society participation; iii) known spaces and mechanisms in the municipality; iv) spaces and mechanisms which, in the respondent's opinion, function adequately; v) challenges to be overcome in their municipality in order to make progress in the democratization of public education management. The questions were organized taking into consideration the principle of participation perceived by two segments of the Municipal Education Council: teachers and civil society. The data collection period comprised the months of April to June 2019.

Given the organization of the results separated by topics (previously defined in the questionnaire), the content analysis was carried out according to the Bardin's (2010) guidelines, primarily considering: who is sending the message and what the message is saying. This analysis model has an essentially qualitative character, although in this study we use statistical parameters to support the interpretations about the design of participation in democratic management in municipal public education systems. In order to carry out the analyses we have adopted the following stages (BARDIN, 2009): i) pre-analysis; ii) exploring the material; iii) treatment of the results; iv) categorization; v) interpretation – in this stage we returned to the theoretical framework to support the analyses, giving preference to recent (empirical) research findings on the subject under study.

The text is organized in two sections. The first brings a theoretical and legal framework on



the principle of democratic education management, associated with the perspective of democratization in the context of the municipal system autonomy. The second section presents an empirical framework from the data collected through the questionnaires applied to the counselors, in order to present the main elements on the dynamics of participation operated in education management.

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION, AND POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The 1988 Federal Constitution inaugurates the autonomy granted to the municipality as a federal entity (Article 1º), considering that federalism is the political system in which entities unite to form the State, endowed with a certain degree of autonomy. The constitutional text, when dealing with the autonomy granted to federal entities, reinforces in Art. 206 the principle of democratic management in the sphere of public education.

The discipline of democratic management of public education is also reinforced in the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education, LDB n. 9.394/96, in articles 14 and 15: Art. 14 deals with the principles of democratic management of public education, and Art. 15 ensures the degrees of autonomy. Adding to these, both the National Education Plan (2001-2011) and the National Education Plan (2014-2024 – Goal 19) prioritize democratic management as one of the main alternatives for national education.

Regarding democratic management, both are important: the understanding of national legislation and the practice that involves effective participation in collegiate instances within the education systems, including spaces such as: Municipal Education Council, Municipal Education Conference, Forum as a space for debate and decision, Pedagogical Political Project, School Councils or equivalent, Multi-year Plan for Education. Under this argument, we highlight that this management model has been defined as a dynamic to be materialized, in order to guarantee the processes of participation and collective decisions (BORDIGNON; GRACINDO, 2000). It must be admitted that participation has not been in the same timeframe as the demands of democratic management, and one of the reasons for that is the existence of conflicts, tensions, and power disputes within municipal education systems (PEREIRA, 2012). In this direction, Lima (2009) argues that democracy is inserted in a space of dispute, mainly because the State finds itself in the condition of establishing the representation of social classes. For these premises, participation and autonomy are the results of struggles and disputes; they are tasks in process because they reframe resistance at every moment when democracy may show signs of fatigue.

The first president to govern Brazil under the Federal Constitution of 1988 was Fernando Collor de Mello, with the mark of the Sector Program of Government Action in Education

(1991), foreseeing as objectives: to insert the country in the new technological revolution, as a way of thinking Brazil taking up space in the modern world. In antagonistic directions, this Program points to democratic management, at the same time that allows the market to interfere in the definition of quality standards of education in a conservative line of speech and action.

After the impeachment of Collor in 1992, Vice President Itamar Franco assumes the presidency. The guidelines for his administration's educational policies are instilled in the Decennial Plan of Education for All (1993-2003), "an instrument of institutional and managerial reorganization." (SOBRINHO, 1993, p. 81). Among other premises, in the order of this argumentation, the Plan defines objectives and strategies for the national education, whose meaning of quality is related to a sense, even if immersed, of an education directed by the Theory of Human Capital.

In 1995, Fernando Henrique Cardoso assumes the Presidency of the Republic, without showing any intention of differentiating the guidelines of social policies from the market imperialism. The educational policies are, in high measure, thought by the World Bank, ECLAC and Unesco (PACHECO; MORAES; EVANGELINA, 2001). The proposal "Hands to work, Brazil" by the FHC administration, edited by the Edelstein Center for Social Research (2008), brings in the text pertinent to education the following orientation: the formation for a clearer conscience about the importance of education, both in what concerns social development and the exercise of citizenship, and for the development in the economic perspective. The educational management field goes hand in hand with the challenge of complying with the constitutional principle of democracy and, at the same time, complying with the determinations of the State's administrative reform funding agencies, which in turn design the changes based on entrepreneurial guidelines (OLIVEIRA, 2009).

In 2003, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva assumes the Presidency of the Republic. Under the logic of neoliberal policies, the Lula administration develops programs and establishes partnerships with municipalities, consolidating, to some extent, a model of social public policies. We consider, however, that the educational policies defended by the Lula administration can be characterized as ambivalent, sometimes presenting ruptures and sometimes presenting permanencies in relation to what had been adopted in this area during the two mandates of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, as Oliveira's (2009) study concludes.

In 2011, Dilma Rousseff assumes the Presidency of the Republic, under the challenge of continuing the improvements pointed out in the Lula administration, including the daily struggle for democracy. In 2016, Dilma is impeached and Brazil begins a new era, a process of transparent democratic rupture, while several entities opposed it, because it represents a threat to the guaranteed rights, especially when we refer to educational rights, as the words of the Editorial (2016) of the journal *Educação e Sociedade* point out. This period marks in a

strong way the entrance of a conservative bourgeois hegemony, which puts at risk the democratic precepts put to education in the 1988 Magna Carta. The public agenda for the education sector is now being assaulted by a position of liberal reform applied in recent decades, based mainly on actions that instill control, privatizations, tests, awards, and punishments (MELO; SOUSA, 2017).

In 2019 Jair Bolsonaro assumes the Presidency of the Republic, having as main concerns in relation to public education: distance education, fight against gender ideology, fight against Marxism, fight against Paulo Freire's ideology. He proposes as a solution to the problems faced by the education sector the hardening of the discipline for students, without indoctrination and without early sexualization, as Oliveira (2018) analyzes.

As a form of resistance from the social actors of public education, we take advantage of Frigotto's (2017) words, when he argues that, under the paradigm of democratic management, public schools learn not to teach what international organizations, market sentries, want, but above all, democratic schools learn to educate for a citizen consciousness, for a critical reading of the reality of the country in its various sectors.

Thus, we consider that the democratization of Brazilian education has not been a linear and constant phenomenon, so that the most conservative and democratic periods are presented in accordance with the political and administrative conditions assumed by the State itself.

DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATION: SPACES AND MECHANISMS OF MUNICIPAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN PIAUÍ

The state of Piauí is the third in the Northeast region in territorial extension, with 252,379 km², divided in 224 municipalities distributed in 4 geographical mesoregions: North, Center-North, Southeast, and Southwest. A calculation performed in December 2019 showed that there are 97 municipalities with an institutionalized system of public education, on a scale of 43.3%; and 56.7% of the municipalities of Piauí are linked to the political and administrative conditions of the State Department of Education and Culture (SEDUC-PI) and the State Education Council of Piauí (CEE-PI).

The survey was conducted with 28 members of the Municipal Education Council (MEC) in municipalities with institutionalized education systems. The profile of the subjects, in accordance with the questionnaire applied, can be identified from three variables: time at the MEC, education, and job linkage.

The data indicate that 64.3% of the MEC members are in their first mandate, which as a general rule lasts 2 years, extended for the same period. Counselors with time between 2 and



3 years total 14.3%. The frequency of 21.4% of members with over 3 years may be related to the extension of their mandate. In order to recognize that the democratic educational management can count on councils as spaces for debates, capable of dialoguing with the executive body (Municipal Department of Education) (BORDIGNON, 2009), the Ministry of Education (2009) recommends the counselors' mandate to be of the minimum of 1 year and the maximum of 4 years, with the possibility of extension for a consecutive term, with the objective of guaranteeing the continuity of the work and municipal education policies.

When we talk about the training of counselors to participate in the Municipal Education Council, the statistics shows us positive data, i.e., 57.15% of them had some kind of training. We emphasize that it was not possible to identify, through the data, if the said training was on the part of the National Program for Training of Municipal Education Counselors (Pro-Council), whose main objective is to qualify the members of municipal councils so that they can act in a satisfactory manner in relation to the particular conditions of the municipal education, as the Ministry of Education portal consulted this year (<http://portal.mec.gov.br/pro-conselho>) informs us. The data does not indicate whether there was also training on the part of the National Union of Municipal Education Counselors (NUMEC), whose roles are: to encourage and guide the creation of new councils; to encourage training and strengthening of counselors so that, in the performance of their duties, they can contribute to the improvement of education in the municipalities (REGIMENTO INTERNO DA UNCME NACIONAL, 2019). However, we emphasize that the purpose of this question is to know whether or not the participants received training before or during his or her work at the Municipal Education Council and, in this case, whether the data corresponds to what was proposed.

The claim about the professional bond was made only to the counselors representing the civil society, a total of 14. The data show us that 100% are municipal civil servants; 85.7% of them have only municipal linkage, and 14.3% have municipal and state linkage. The data may be indicating a limited participation, considering that the institutional linkage to the public power allows the interference in the decision-making processes. A survey conducted by Ribeiro, Vicentina, and Silva (2018) on the Municipal Education Council of São Miguel Arcanjo-SP brings data from an interview that goes in the same direction of the reality of Piauí. Two of the interviewees defend the participation of the civil society in the Council and not only people linked to public authorities, especially from the municipal education sector, because although it may be a more convenient measure, it is not the right way; they defend a broader representation, so as to involve more people from the community, going beyond the servants linked to the Municipal Department of Education. A study conducted by Souza and Lord (2012), on the Municipal Council of Sinop-MT, allows us to reflect on the limits of the civil society participation. They conclude that the Council enhance the participation of the civil society, but at the same time it also limits this participation when demands that the body should be composed of people with expressive knowledge in education. Perhaps, for this



reason, most of the counselors are people linked in some way to the municipal department of education.

With the data on the profile of the responding counselors, we move on to the questions, which allow us to have a vision more focused on opportunities, spaces and mechanisms of participation, as well as the challenges facing the democratization of the public education.

1. Design of participation

Table 1. On opportunities for people to participate in decision-making processes regarding public education issues in the municipal sphere, the respondent would say that in his/her municipality:

There are many opportunities and they are adequate	There are many opportunities, but they are partially adequate	There are only some opportunities, but they are adequate	There are only some opportunities, and they are partially adequate	Total
20	3	2	3	28
71.43%	10.71%	7.15%	10.71%	100%

Source: Survey through application of the questionnaire (Year – 2009)

The data in Table 1 reveal that there are opportunities to participate (adequate, through the exercise of full participation without public power interference, or partially adequate, that is, there is participation, but with some public power interference): "there are many opportunities (more spaces and mechanisms for participation) and they are adequate" was the variable indicated by the majority of counselors, with 71.43% of the responses; "there are many opportunities, but they are partially adequate" appears in 10.71% of the responses; "there are only some opportunities (fewer spaces and mechanisms for participation), but they are adequate" appears in 7.15% of the responses, and "there are only some opportunities, and they are partially adequate" appears in 10.71% of the responses.

This discussion, in light of the data, deserves our reflections. In studies conducted in other states involving members of the Municipal Education Council, the theme of participation is in the spotlight, as we can identify from a survey conducted by Ribeiro, Vicentina, and Silva (2018), in which they conclude that participation calls for awareness and action to decide and infer on issues related to education, and also to help build a project of society capable of writing its history in a conscious manner. Therefore, in this sense, it implies the need to seek, encourage and expand society's participation, to seek the formation of counselors and to strengthen actions.

The effective participation of society, although there are opportunities, will only be possible through the political capacity of the council itself, but we cannot deny that this is a task in process, as Souza and Lord (2012) conclude in their research, i.e., a process that is beginner and late as a result of its historical formation. Salles (2011), based on the results of his

research on the participation of the Municipal Education Council of Ribeirão Preto-SP, concludes that broadening the debate on democratic institutional arrangements requires strengthening participatory institutions and mechanisms of participation in the decision-making bodies of the state. For the author, we are still a certain distance away from being able to see in representative politics a satisfactory possibility in the conquest of rights, and he argues that it is in participation that full democracy is built. In this understanding, participation is a mechanism that facilitates the growth of critical consciousness, strengthens its power of claiming and prepares it to instill more power in society (BORDENAVE, 1994); he reinforces the autonomy of the Council in relation to the Municipal Executive power; expands the political consciousness of the citizen; reinforces the knowledge of the participants regarding the needs of educational management and the needs of the population.

Emphasizing that the participation of the civil society is a task in process, we still see the need for a greater interaction between the population and the State. We need, therefore, to be careful about the low level of participation in the spaces and mechanisms of public education systems, because if there is little or no participation, it is the dominant culture marked by centralism, bureaucracy and subservience to the capital that is served.

Studies on Municipal Education Councils in Brazil deal preponderantly with the participation of society and, among other aspects, the levels of this participation. For example, we cite a study carried out in Rio de Janeiro by Souza e Vasconcelos (2012), in which they conclude that due to ideological and party-political disputes, the counselor's lack of concern with the technical competence makes the conscious sociopolitical participation even more complex on the part of the participants representing sectors of the civil society.

In a recent study by Prado, Almeida, and Parrela (2018) on the work of the Municipal Education Council of Montes Claros-MG, they argue that this body has a low participation of people from the community in the debates held by the public power. The data from the interviews applied by the researchers identify the limitations of the Municipal Councils in which the mark of participation assumes a too instrumental trait. As for their conclusions, they argue that the strongest participation of the society in social control reinforces the effectiveness of public policies, making them more adequate to the needs of the collective and to the public interest in terms of their reach and purpose.

After discussing the existence of opportunities for society to participate in the Municipal Education Council of the municipalities researched, we now present the analyses regarding the spaces and mechanisms of this participation within the municipal education systems in Piauí, as shown in Tables 2 and 3.



2. Participation: spaces and mechanisms

Table 2. Institutionalized spaces of participation that exist in the surveyed municipality, those known and those that function adequately, according to the respondents

N. º	Spaces	Known		Function adequately	
		Total	Frequency	Total	Frequency
1	Municipal Education Council	28	100%	23	82.14%
2	School Councils	26	92.85%	11	39.28%
3	Municipal Education Conference	23	82.14%	18	64.25%
4	Municipal Education Forum	19	67.85%	8	28.57%
5	Others: MCCA, SFC, Fundeb Council	5	17.85%	2	7.14%

Source: Survey through application of the questionnaire (Year – 2009)

Table 2 presents two categories related to the participation spaces: the known spaces and the spaces that function adequately, according to the respondents. At first hand we observe that the frequency of known participation spaces decreases when we want to know if they function adequately, from the perspective of the respondent counselor. The Municipal Education Council is known by 100% of the responding public, however 82.14% recognize it as functioning adequately; School Councils are known by 92.85% of the participants and recognized as functioning properly by only 39.28% of them. These bodies are structures proper to the municipal education system, have a consultative and deliberative character, are spaces that enable the participation of citizens in decisions about educational public policies and, somehow, contribute to the strengthening of participatory democracy at both the system and school levels. On a smaller scale there are: The Municipal Education Conference known by 82.14% and recognized by 64.25%; the Municipal Education Forum known by 67.85% and recognized by 28.57% of the participants. The participants cite other spaces: The Municipal Council for Children and Adolescents (MCCA), the School Feeding Council (SFC) and Fundeb Council, known for 17.85% and recognized by 7.14% as adequate in terms of functioning.

Broadly, the data show a certain fragility of the democratic culture, as well as there seems to be a certain conformism regarding the centralization of decision-making power, planning and representative democracy. The data from this research are, to a certain extent, in line with the conclusions of a study conducted by Stürmer (2011), with public school teachers in the state of Santa Catarina, about democracy and participation in public schools. The research data show the presence of marks of a vertical management model and, consequently, the weakening of the representative power. The author concludes by calling attention to the need for an attentive look at the involvement of school communities in guaranteeing the right to decide on educational policies. Another study, also conducted in the state of Santa Catarina by Nardi, Rebelatto, and Gamba (2013), is part of a survey of the main mechanisms and spaces for participation in municipal education systems. The study concludes that the options taken by the municipalities contemplated in the survey do not point to positions that



demonstrate the expansion of the possibilities of democratization of public education management.

In this direction is also the study conducted by Andrade (2010), which analyzes the construction of a democratic culture related to the municipal education system of Recife, considering the interrelationship between the spaces of participation, which involve educational management. The data point out that, although the instances of participation are active regarding the decentralization of school and educational management, they do not demonstrate the ability to effectively intervene in decisions about the policies of the educational system. In relation to municipal education management, the author concludes that the lack of articulation among such instances constitutes the main reason for centralizing decision-making power under the command of the Department of Education. This may be related to the difficulty of citizen participation in the spaces of public education management, which is often seen as limited. Let's look at the data in Table 3.

Table 3. Institutionalized mechanisms of participation that exist in the municipality researched, those known and those that function adequately, according to respondents

N. o	Mechanisms	Known		Function adequately	
		Total	Frequency	Total	Frequency
1	Municipal Education Plan	24	85.71%	24	85.71%
2	Political Pedagogical Project	23	82.14%	19	67.85%
3	Other: indication, by the public power, of names for principals of municipal schools	11	39.28%	5	17.85%

Source: Survey through application of the questionnaire (Year – 2009)

In Table 3, only two mechanisms of participation in education management in the municipalities surveyed are identified by the respondents: the Municipal Education Plan and the Political Pedagogical Project, in a relatively high frequency, both in the condition of known (85.71% and 82.14% respectively) and in the condition of functioning adequately (85.71% and 67.85% respectively). The indication of names for principals is known as a mechanism of participation among 39.28% of the participants, and only 17.85% recognize it as adequate. In a study previously conducted by Ribeiro and Nardi (2018), we identified in the set of laws, which created the education systems in the municipalities of Piauí, that there is little visibility for the election of principal, since in a set of 87 laws (87 municipalities with an education system in the year 2018), this mechanism appears on a scale of 20.7%.

The educational legislation, and here we highlight the National Education Plan (2014-2024) and the set of Laws previously mentioned, provides for the creation of the Municipal Education Plan, in order to indicate the goals and strategies for the educational policy. If on one hand we can celebrate the fact that the Municipal Education Plan is an instrument for planning local educational policy, on the other hand, it has not always been constituted as a mechanism for participation and articulation between the civil society (citizens) and the public power (Municipal Department of Education). We were based on a study carried out by



Souza and Alcântara (2017) on Municipal Education Plans (MEP), in which they came to the conclusion that the plans are marked by a lack of local and regional articulation, which constitute challenges to be overcome as a way of adapting them to the current PNE; they show that an education plan can only constitute an independent and sufficient management mechanism if it is configured in a decision guidance document. It is, therefore, an important mechanism for participation in democratic management, so it is recommended that the various segments of the civil society be involved in its construction, implementation and evaluation.

It is difficult for us to admit that part of the educational professionals in public schools do not clearly know the principles of democratic management of public education and, by extension, the data show us that the mechanisms of participation are concepts under construction. This design of public education management and its intricacies can also be evidenced in other states, as, for example, from the data of a study carried out by Santiago and Alves (2014) on the Political Pedagogical Project and its implications for management in a school in the municipality of Maracaju-MS. The research showed that the institution researched has a Pedagogical Project, but it was not unfolded in the school, and, according to the authors, the Pedagogical Proposal is not used when planning and carrying out the activities. Although the school affirms to have a democratic management, in practice the participation does not happen satisfactorily, since the school follows almost exclusively the guidelines of the Municipal Department of Education.

We say that the data in Table 3 are in this direction, from the point of view of the responding counselors, they indicate that the mechanisms exist and need to function adequately, in order to meet the demands instilled by the principle of democratic management.

The challenges faced by the municipalities in advancing democratization are shown in Table 4, according to the subjects' notes. This was an open question from the questionnaire applied to the participants of the study, which allowed them to indicate up to three challenges to be overcome in their municipality.

Table 4. Challenges to be overcome in the municipality in order to make progress in building and consolidating democratic management in basic education

N.º	Challenges	Mentions	Frequency
1	Participation of the society in spaces and mechanisms of the system	20	71.42%
2	Teachers' training	9	32.14%
3	Improving the public education management	9	32.14%
4	Investment in public education	9	32.14%
5	Commitment of public school teachers	5	17.85%
6	Valorization of public education	4	14.28%
7	Election for principals to replace the nomination	3	10.71%
8	Access and permanence of students, in order to ensure the quality of	2	7.14%



	education		
9	Improving access to schools in rural areas	1	3.57%

Source: Survey through application of the questionnaire (Year – 2009)

The data presented in Table 4 were taken from the indications of the answers issued by the participants in the questionnaire, regarding what they consider as challenges to be overcome in the municipality in order to make progress in building and consolidating democratic management in basic education. They were able to inform up to three challenges and, for this reason, the answers were sometimes repeated. Based on the number of mentions for each of the challenges raised, we calculated the frequency indicated in the Table.

The participation of the society in the spaces and mechanisms of the municipal public education system regains its importance, appearing in 71.42% of the answers presented by the respondents; the challenges drop by half: teachers' training to work in basic education (32.14%), improving the democratic management of municipal education as a possibility for its materialization (32.14%) and investments in public education (32.14%); in a descending line we can see: commitment of teachers to quality public education (17.85%), valorization of the public education, in the sense that it is public for all (14.28%), election for public school principals in substitution for public power nominations (10.71%), access and permanence of students as a guarantee of the quality of public education (7.14%) and improving access to schools in rural areas, including improvement of roads and school transport (3.57%). The data show us that the education systems need to develop actions that allow for greater involvement of social agents, in order to instill the principle of the democratic management, and at the same time, advance in the democratization of public education, whether at the network level or at the school level. In order to the advances in democratization be perceived, it is fundamental to raise the awareness of the society and also of the public power for the transformation from a centralizing system to a system that foments collective actions and the exercise of the representative democracy.

This perception is present in the results of other studies on the principle of democratic management of public education. We quote a survey conducted by Soares and Cardozo (2017) in municipalities of Maranhão. The authors conclude that the challenges exist, while recognizing that there is a long way to go in order to expand and materialize the principle of democratic management. They also acknowledge that efforts and advances exist in the search for greater autonomy and the consequent realization of that principle within the educational systems in Maranhão. Flach and Sakata (2016), investigating educational systems in the state of Paraná, consider, in general terms, that the democratic management tends to suffer distortions in relation to the political practice and, in this sense, one of the main challenges for researchers in the area implies understanding such distortions. In alignment with the specific objectives, they conclude that democratic management within the Municipal Educational System of Ponta Grossa-PR is also a construction and needs to be a goal to be



materialized, since it is legally foreseen, but has difficulty in finding a shelter in a collegiate body; they also affirm that the representativeness in the analyzed systems is deficient and, as a result, the democratic debate tends to be deficient. These are questions that indicate probable obstacles that need to be corrected if the democratic management is to materialize satisfactorily.

Finally, in possession of the data obtained through the application of questionnaires on the participation in the educational policy of municipal systems, we consider the reference to Aranda's (2014) arguments timely: on the one hand, there is criticism to the perspectives that defend neoliberal participation, that is, formal participation, capable of keeping untouched the economic relations between the class that owns the capital and the working class, necessary for capitalism; on the other hand, there are those who defend the democratic participation, which is really constitutive of a project of society that is different from the one formatted by the imperialism of capital, but, on the contrary, a society fundamentally constituted of human and social meaning. We recognize, however, from the considerations of the study by Soares and Cardozo (2017), that it is necessary to make a reflection on how education systems and schools should be organized, in order to concretize the principle of democratic management, making possible the participation of several segments of society – a challenge pointed out in this study, perhaps the most urgent – in the formulation and proposition of educational policies that develop in both places – systems and schools.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The democratic management indicates the widening of participation through public spaces of participatory democracy and institutionalized mechanisms, of a consultative, deliberative and supervisory nature, for overcoming authoritarian practices in the design of educational policies. The studies previously mentioned about the principle of participation in democratic management, as well as this one, show us that it is a considerably complex process, and its effectiveness is marked by political, institutional, and cultural elements.

The first section of this study was based on legal documents of the Brazilian State: CF/88 (Federal Constitution), LDB/96 (Law of Directives and Bases), PNE/2014 (National Education Plan), in order to situate the relevance of the principle of democratic management in the municipal educational systems. On this theme we point out some aspects that emerged from the debate, namely: it is necessary both the understanding of the national legislation and the practice that involves the participation in instituted spaces and mechanisms; the participation has not been in the same timeframe as the demands of the democratic management; participation and autonomy are results of fights and disputes; the practice that involves participation refers to the understanding about the reality in its varied dimensions



(social, political, cultural, and economic); the democratic management of the Brazilian education is a task in process and we have a lot to learn in this way.

The empirical research, through the application of the questionnaires, allowed us to make the following considerations: the dynamics of participation in spaces and mechanisms in municipal education systems in Piauí is a reality similar to that of other Brazilian states, as shown by the examples cited in the discussions of the results; most of the counselors participating in the study are in their first year of mandate and have received training to work in the Municipal Education Council; all of the counselors respondents have job linkages with the municipal government; the opportunities for participation exist, although the data indicate the limiting nature of this participation; the institutionalized spaces for participation identified by the respondents refer to: Municipal Education Councils, School Councils, Municipal Education Conferences, Municipal Education Forums, Municipal Councils for Children and Adolescents, School Feeding Councils, and Fundeb Councils; the institutionalized participation mechanisms identified were the following: Municipal Education Plans and Political Pedagogical Projects; the municipality's challenge in relation to the democratic management, with the largest number of mentions, concerns society's participation in the spaces and mechanisms of the public education system.

Participation as a principle of democratic management is a theme on which we can register setbacks, gaps and advances, as well as problems related to the understanding of concepts, purposes and practices, as concluded by Aranda (2014), from a bibliographic study. Flach and Sakata (2016), in a study carried out in this area, consider that its implementation in education systems is marked by cultural and political conceptions; and it is still an anxious reality, since it is almost always protected by the interests of the public power and, thus, guides the legitimization of the actions of managers without, necessarily, promoting a debate, in practice, democratic.

This scenario is not exclusive to the field of education. For example, data from a study conducted by Kleba, Comerlato, and Frozza (2015) on Municipal Councils of Social Assistance and Health indicate that the existing participation mechanisms used in public spaces can be expanded as a possibility to consolidate, from a political and practical perspective, the participatory and decision-making processes in the field of the public policy management.

Therefore, we may not have all the answers to understand the design of participation in the materialization of democratic education management in municipal education systems, but we are able to understand that this design is not a local reality, since studies show, somewhat around Brazil, that scenarios recur, considering general complexities and local particularities.

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