

Mechanisms for strengthening democracy in school management: possibilities in a municipal education center

Mecanismos de fortalecimento da democracia na gestão escolar: possibilidades em um Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil

Mecanismos para fortalecer la democracia en la gestión escolar: posibilidades construidas en un centro municipal de educación infantil

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to understand how school management actions related to participatory planning can serve as democratizing mechanisms. To this end, the researchers selected the Municipal Center for Early Childhood Education (*Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil* — CMEI) Professor Paulo Rosas, located in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil, as the research setting. A qualitative approach was adopted, and, in addition to document analysis, data were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews with the school community. The results showed that the CMEI has promoted a democratic and participatory educational environment, as management takes the Political-Pedagogical Project (*Projeto Político-Pedagógico* — PPP) as the starting point for the collective construction of its actions, enabling the different segments of the school community to contribute meaningfully. It was concluded that the PPP can serve as a basis for ensuring the right to public education that is publicly managed, free of charge, democratic, and of socially referenced quality.

Keywords: Municipal Childhood Education Center. Democratic Management. Participatory Planning. Political-Pedagogical Project.

RESUMO

A investigação objetivou compreender como as ações da gestão escolar, relacionadas ao planejamento participativo, podem servir como mecanismos democratizadores. Para tanto, elegeu-se como campo de pesquisa o Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil (CMEI) Professor Paulo

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Rosas, localizado em Recife, Pernambuco. Adotou-se abordagem qualitativa e, além da análise documental, os dados foram coletados por meio de observações e entrevistas semiestruturadas junto à comunidade escolar. Os resultados demonstraram que o CMEI tem promovido um ambiente educacional democrático e participativo, uma vez que a gestão tem como ponto de partida o Projeto Político Pedagógico (PPP) para a construção coletiva de suas ações, possibilitando que os diversos segmentos da comunidade escolar contribuam de forma significativa. Concluiu-se que o PPP pode servir de base para a garantia do direito à educação pública, de gestão pública, gratuita, democrática e de qualidade socialmente referenciada.

Palavras-chave: Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil. Gestão Democrática. Planejamento Participativo. Projeto Político Pedagógico.

RESUMEN

La investigación tuvo como objetivo comprender cómo las acciones de gestión escolar, relacionadas con la planificación participativa, pueden servir como mecanismos democratizadores. Para ello, los investigadores eligieron como campo de investigación el Centro Municipal de Educación Infantil (CMEI) Profesor Paulo Rosas, ubicado en Recife-PE. Se adoptó un enfoque cualitativo y, además del análisis de documentos, se recolectaron datos a través de observaciones y entrevistas semiestruturadas con la comunidad escolar. Los resultados demostraron que el CMEI ha promovido un ambiente educativo democrático y participativo, debido a que la gestión tiene como punto de partida el Proyecto Político Pedagógico (PPP) para la construcción colectiva de sus acciones, permitiendo a los diferentes segmentos de la comunidad escolar contribuir de manera significativa. Se concluyó que el PPP puede servir de base para garantizar el derecho a la educación pública, de gestión pública, gratuita, democrática y de calidad socialmente referenciada.

Palabras clave: Centro Municipal de Educación Infantil. Gestión Democrática. Planificación Participativa. Proyecto Político Pedagógico.

INITIAL THOUGHTS

Studies on educational management have shown that the current situation of Brazilian education results from both progress and regression. The notion of management, which has changed throughout history, was linked to the field of corporation management, meaning that it focused on technical matters, leaving aside the pedagogical and social dimensions resulting from the relationships established within a teaching institution.

Due to the need to overcome the prevailing style of school management, discussions on free education and democratic management gained momentum during the first half of the 20th century, driven by the work of intellectuals who supported the New School movement and advocated the organization of the educational system, along with the reformulation of teaching methods (Vieira, 2001).

Considering the context of the 1930s, the creation of the Ministry of Education and Public Health — now Ministry of Education — stands out. It was established to systematize ideas organized by the supporters of the New School regarding the need for a democratic, compulsory, and free education of quality for all. In this changing context, school management underwent a transformation process, with the creation of a national curriculum, educational policies, and a legal framework that made education more centralized (Melo, 2012).

Emphasizing the stage of early childhood education within the educational scenario, daycares, also underwent changes, as they initially operated with a welfare-oriented approach, without addressing social, intellectual, motor, and emotional development (Oliveira, 2014). With new educational policies focused on early childhood education, especially after the 1988 Federal Constitution, a movement to strengthen these spaces began, assigning them responsibility for promoting work that enables, beyond hygiene and feeding, the full development of children.

The law *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (LDB), No. 9.394, of December 20, 1996, reinforced the principles established in the Federal Constitution and is considered a relevant milestone for the organization and the regulation of Brazilian education. In the first stage of basic education, LDB establishes that it is the responsibility of both the family and the State, and that it must be freely offered in daycares for children up to three years old, and in preschools for children aged four to five (Brasil, 1996).

Within this broader context, it is noteworthy that the institution currently known as *Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil (CMEI) Professor Paulo Rosas*, located in the city of Recife, Pernambuco (PE), was founded in 2007 and serves children from 0 to 5 years old. The pedagogic work conducted in the space, according to Figueiredo, Brandão, and Macedo (2019), results from a process of discussions, text studies, and exchanges of experiences that began even before its opening and continues to this day.

Vieira (2007) highlights that, as a field of interests, management requires the constant presence of discourse as well as negotiation, which are necessary for the establishment of consensus. Regarding planning conducted by educational institutions, Silva (2021) emphasizes that, although the manager is directly responsible for it, in order to achieve a democratic orientation, it must be built on the principle of participation, involving collective work that integratively includes all segments of the school community.

Based on this understanding, the following research question is proposed: how do management actions related to participatory school planning at *CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas* function as mechanisms for democratization?

CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas, the research field of this study, results from a partnership between Recife City Hall and Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE). It is the only institution characterized by such a partnership in the State of Pernambuco, making it a unique case and drawing attention in the effort to understand how the process of developing participatory planning is conducted in an institution with specific characteristics.

This research aimed to evaluate participatory school planning as a tool for democratization of management at *CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas*. The specific objectives were as follows:

- To map the school planning instruments used at the institution;
- To characterize the development of participatory school planning;
- To identify the functions of participatory school planning in the construction of a democratic environment.

A qualitative field study was conducted, using observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with members of the school community as data collection procedures. The strategies proposed by Bardin (1977) were used for content analysis and, consequently, for the development of thematic categories that guided the analysis.

In order to address the stated objectives, the following sections are presented: the first, on management planning, is divided into three parts and addresses management and its branches, democratic school management, and participatory school planning. Subsequently, the methodological approach is described, followed by the results and discussion, and finally, the concluding remarks.

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

MANAGEMENT AND ITS BRANCHES

The field of Educational Policy and Management presents a division between educational and school management. However, it is important to emphasize that, although treated separately, both coexist in an interconnected manner. Educational management is defined, according to the 1988 Federal Constitution (*Constituição Federal* — CF/88) and Law No. 9.394/1996 (LDB/1996), as a space of governmental actions at the federal, state, or municipal levels.

In this sense, it comprises a macro-level sphere, as it concerns the management of national education. Vieira (2007, p. 60, our translation) indicates that, in the aforementioned official documents, educational management is expressed through the

organization of federal, state, and municipal school systems; by the Union's, the States' and the cities' commission; and by the differing forms of articulation between the normative, deliberative and executive instances of the educational field; and by the offer of scholar education by the private and the public sectors.¹

Regarding school management, the author explains that teaching institutions have, as their main duty, the development and implementation of a pedagogical proposal. Therefore, school management should coordinate material resources — such as facilities, equipment, and financial assets — as well as immaterial aspects, including people, cultures, and perspectives, in addition to fostering relationships with the community and supporting teaching and learning, which are its central pillars.

According to Souza (2017), the first studies on school management — previously conceptualized School Administration (SA) — emerged in the 1930s and can be understood as divided into two major groups: classic theories and critical approaches. Alongside these developments, changes also occurred in the role of the manager, who was previously seen as the central figure in the school but is now understood as working collaboratively with the entire school community.

In the 1980s, the first discussions on the need to overcome the Brazilian educational model, based on an authoritarian and technicist approach, emerged. In legal terms, democratic management appeared for the first time in the CF (Brasil, 1988), specifically in Article 206, which presents the set of principles underlying national education. Subsequently, LDB addressed the issue in Article 3 and reinforced the importance of the participation for democratic management from two perspectives: internally, through the involvement of education professionals in the development of the political-pedagogical project (PPP); and externally, through the participation of the school community.

In the National Education Plan (*Plano Nacional de Educação* — PNE) (2014–2024), democratic management is addressed in Goal 19, which established a two-year deadline for its implementation and outlined eight strategies for its achievement. Pantoja and Damasceno (2022) highlight that this goal was not limited to the relevance or necessity of direct elections for school managers — an instrument that strengthens democracy in schools. Moreover, the text includes terms such as meritocracy and democracy, which express distinct but complementary conceptions.

From the above, it can be understood that the need for democratic management aimed the implementation of quality education (Azevedo, Marques and Aguiar, 2016). Based on this premise, the topic of democratic management in school management is discussed below.

1 In the original: “Organização dos sistemas de ensino federal, estadual e municipal; das incubências da União, dos Estados e dos Municípios; das diferentes formas de articulação entre as instâncias normativas, deliberativas e executivas do setor educacional; e da oferta de educação escolar pelo setor público e privado” (Vieira, 2007, p. 60).

DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Souza (2009) considers democratic management as a process through which, in a collective way, the school community identifies problems and, after that, discusses them and evaluates actions to enable possible solutions. Therefore, in the school context, democratic management must be linked to mechanisms aiming to promote the social participation of students, educators, parents and guardians, and other workers, effectively in schools for better operation of the educational system (Vieira, 2007; Pinheiro, 2018).

Therefore, democratic management cannot be understood as a prize achieved at the end of a run because, on the contrary, it is a goal that needs to be constantly built and improved. It must compose the school routine in a mediating and transforming manner through collective, non-fragmented practices, taking into account the need to distance mechanical processes in education (Aguiar, 2012).

Gracindo (1997) believes that, to enable the process of democratization of schools, it is necessary to define some priorities, such as: rescuing the public sense of social practice in education; the elaboration of quality education for everyone; democracy in both access and student permanence; and the existence of a democratic education that reveals itself as an internal democratic practice.

Moreover, to attach democracy to school management, it is relevant that all those involved with the teaching institution understand the relevance and the complexity of its implementation, with the need for collective and individual work to be conducted together, seeking the common good (Aguiar, 2012; Santos, 2021). Therefore, Silva (2007) highlights that participation is learned when practiced; thus, democratic management is built through experience, when it is understood not as a promoter of general satisfaction, but as a means of addressing the interests of the majority.

After understanding that the manager plays a pivotal role in the formation of a democratic school, Aguiar (2012) points out that this role must be carried out with responsibility, following the ethical principles established by official documents. Among forms of provision — indication, contest, selection process, and community election — the most democratic one, according to Mendonça (2000), is the latter.

Although, the same author believes that the manner of choosing a manager does not eliminate the centrality of such figure in the institution's organization and functioning, Silva (2007) and Marques (2012) agree that the election, although relevant, does not guarantee the existence of democratic management. Likewise, other forms of appointment do not eliminate this possibility, as a manager who has not assumed the role through community choice can also enable democratic relations in the educational environment. Even so, although an election does not guarantee democracy in teaching institutions, it remains the best option to facilitate the autonomy and participation of the school community.

Regarding the strengthening of democratic management in schools, another mechanism is the implementation of collegiate bodies, groups formed by representatives of the groups that compose the school community. Collegiate bodies have consultive, deliberative, executive, and evaluative roles, promoting power distribution, as the manager's figure does not appear in a centralized way in matters related to decision-making in the school environment (Mendonça, 2000).

Moreover, Silva (2007) highlights the existence of some basic conditions necessary for democracy in school management: the training of education workers and administrative technician committed to the functions performed; adequate working schedules and fair remuneration; the presence of collegiate organizations formed by school groups, with autonomy to collectively decide on school-related issues; the existence of a pedagogical project that is collectively built, executed, and evaluated; and managers engaged with education.

There is no management in isolation, just as democratic management is not viable without participation. In this respect, among the challenges found for a democratic openness in schools, besides authoritarian managers, is the community's indifference in collective decision-making (Silva, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness among subjects internally and externally involved in the educational process regarding the relevance of establishing horizontal relations for the effective fulfillment of the right to socially referenced quality education. Based on this, the next subsection addresses participatory management as a tool to strengthen the principle of democratic management.

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

The act of planning is part of daily activities, whether to organize tasks, achieve specific goals, or successfully conduct complex projects. According to Santos (2014, p. 14, our translation), "planning is a follow-up tool with a procedural character, along its application, to planned actions that must be reconsidered and resumed according to the goals achieved, or in order to revise applied methods."² This practice, understood here as a synonym for organization, reveals itself as a tool of great importance when applied in the field of education.

In the educational context, planning is present in all stages of organization, encompassing both macro (federal, state, and municipal plans) and micro spheres (school management and classroom development). Vianna (1986) understands educational planning as a set of plans focused on the country's development and emphasizes the need for collaborative work among professionals from different fields of education.

Highlighting the school context, planning takes on a broader and more complex meaning, mainly seeking to answer the following questions: *whom to teach, how, where, when, by whom, and with which goals and costs*. According to Souza and Santos (2019), this process of organizing teaching action needs to be articulated with the social context in which the school is inserted, as this environment undergoes external influences in the political, economic, and cultural fields. Therefore, the development of school planning must begin with a study of the school's reality.

Santos (2014) argues that planning has many functions within the school space, including organizing students' and teachers' schedules, preparing projects, structuring the teaching environment, and organizing annual school events, among others. It consists of "a work activity, characterized by the integration of all sectors of human social activity, in a global process, to the solution of regular problems"³ (Vianna, 1986, p. 23, our translation). This is a collective work in which all parties have significant influence over the decision-making process through ideas, suggestions, and proposals.

Moreover, there must be a dialogue among those who participate in the school community, practicing exchange experiences and interactions to promote integration into the environment. Participatory planning must start from community decisions in a process "that considers people along their values, feelings and socio-economic-political-cultural situations"⁴ (Dalmas, 1997, p. 27, our translation). In this view, community decisions refer to a process in which the majority's choices are considered.

2 In the original: "O planejamento é instrumento de acompanhamento e tem caráter processual, no decorrer de sua aplicação, às ações planejadas devem ser repensadas e retomadas conforme os objetivos atingidos, ou a fim de rever metodologias aplicadas" (Santos, 2014, p. 14).

3 In the original: "Numa atividade de trabalho, que se caracteriza pela integração de todos os setores da atividade humana social, num processo global, para a solução de problemas comuns" (Vianna, 1986, p. 23).

4 In the original: "Que considere as pessoas com seus valores, sentimentos e situações de ordem sócio-econômico-político-cultural" (Dalmas, 1997, p. 27).

This practice has different forms of implementation, one of which is participation as involvement, considering not only presence, but also ideas, opinions, and full engagement in decision-making. It is considered the fullest level of participation and, therefore, the most effective form of democracy. For full participation, it is important that decisions move beyond the centrality of the management and technical team, generating a sense of authorship and collectivity among subjects from other segments. Luck (2006) notes that all individuals have influence, even if they are not aware of it, although lack of awareness may generate negative consequences for school organization.

One of the main instruments establishing active participation within the school environment is the PPP. Before defining it, its terminology must be understood. According to Gadotti and Romão (1997), confusion between the concepts of “plan” and “project” is frequent in education. While the former focuses on achieving goals and procedures, the latter requires constant revision of what has been established. Therefore, the PPP is always an ongoing process that requires continuous reevaluation and modification according to emerging demands.

Gadotti and Romão (1997) also state that all pedagogic projects are necessarily political; however, to give due relevance to the political dimension within the pedagogical context, the term “political-pedagogical” must be used in the document. In this perspective, the PPP is elaborated within the context in which it is inserted, reflecting values, ideological choices, and worldviews that express the school’s political positions. Therefore, the elaboration of a project requires a defined political direction.

According to Veiga (1998), the PPP must not be developed merely to meet a bureaucratic requirement, to be archived and forgotten. It must be experienced daily within the school environment by all those involved in the educational process. The PPP goes beyond classroom activity planning, as it seeks, continuously, to solve problems that affect the school through discussions and reflections in which the entire school community participates.

LDB (Brasil, 1996), in Articles 12 and 13, establishes the elaboration and execution of a pedagogical proposal within the educational institution. Article 13 specifically addresses the direct participation of teachers in the development of this proposal. The document establishes that teachers must fulfill their work plan in accordance with the pedagogical proposal established by the school, referring to the organization of teaching within the institution.

In summary, the PPP represents participatory planning within an educational institution. Its development and continuous revision must focus on the involvement of various actors in a collective process of transparency and collaboration among all members of the school community. Therefore, it must not be regarded as mere bureaucracy, but as a key tool for socially referenced quality education.

METHODOLOGY

The research’s methodological and theoretical frameworks adopted a qualitative approach, characterized by Bogdan and Biklen (1994) as aiming data that are mostly descriptive, in which the most relevant goal is to consider the process rather than its product. In this kind of research, data collection is carried out through the researcher’s direct contact with the circumstance to be studied, which can involve people, places, or even processes where personal interactions take place (Minayo, 2002).

Moreover, this kind of research seeks to understand the nature of things through the researcher’s sensitive view. Minayo (2002) states that these traits cannot be measured or quantified by variables. This view is shared by Goldenberg (2004), who affirms that the researcher needs to be creative to collect and analyze data, as, unlike the quantitative approach, it does not present a set of rules for collection and, therefore, cannot be measured.

Regarding the nature of this research, it was characterized as applied research, understood as practical, aimed at solving specific reality-based problems (Marconi and Lakatos, 2002; Gerhardt and Silveira, 2009). To achieve the research's goals, two kinds of procedures were selected: documental research and case study. These procedures were used along field research, aiming to obtain information through direct contact with the researched object, which requires the researcher to move to the space where the studied facts occur or have occurred in order to record them (Gonsalves, 2001).

Therefore, the research was conducted at CMEI *Professor Paulo Rosas*, which serves children aged 0 to 5 years, in a full-time schedule from the nursery to Group 3. Among the aspects that make this institution a unique example, two are highlighted: the partnership between Recife City Administration and UFPE; and the pedagogical basis centered on the appreciation of existing spaces, as pointed out by Brandão and Rosa (2019), organized with the goal of stimulating learning through actions of knowledge expansion.

Concerning material structure, CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas presents a broad space organized into: a sand yard, a garden, four environment rooms, a nursery with its own kitchen, where babies' food is prepared, a resource room, a cafeteria for workers, exclusive bathrooms for workers and children, a teacher's room, a library, a laundry room, and a kitchen. All of them are adapted to receive children: appropriately sized sinks, chairs, and small tables, as well as toys and materials arranged with accessibility in mind.

The first procedure used was documental research. Lüdke and André (1986) emphasize the need to specify the type of document to be studied. Therefore, in this research, Institution's PPP was analyzed, which fits the definition of a technical document, as it presents specificities such as a pedagogical basis and future propositions.

As a following step, a case study was conducted. Bogdan and Biklen (1994) compare this method's planning to a funnel, in which the widest part represents the possibilities of study, considering both places and people. According to Fonseca (2002, p. 33, our translation), a case study aims to "deeply know the how and why of a specific situation, supposed to be unique in many ways."⁵

Moreover, it is necessary to point out that the case study can go beyond a single situation, comprising a group of people, a subject, or a family (Prodanov and Freitas, 2013); in other words, an object that presents specificities. In the case of the CMEI studied here, beyond the specificities already mentioned, its partnership with UFPE is highlighted. For example, 50% of vacancies are reserved for children of the institution's workers, specifically teachers and administrative technicians, as well as the organization of educational meetings, such as seminars and training sessions.

Data collection in the field was conducted in two ways. The first was through an observational technique, which, according to Marconi and Lakatos (2002), cannot be characterized only by listening and seeing, as experienced facts must be studied; therefore this resource allows the perception of details of the reality of the studied environment. Correia (2009) highlights that, at the beginning, the researcher seeks to understand the general aspects of the space, broadly speaking, conducting wide and descriptive observation. Through visits to the field, this view is refined, focusing on specific facts or events.

The second technic used for data collection was semi-structured interviews, which allowed the combination of closed and open questions, enabling the interviewee to feel free to not dwell excessively on the questions and to bring diverse aspects into their responses (Minayo, 2010).

5 In the original: "Conhecer em profundidade o como e o porquê de uma determinada situação que se supõe ser única em muitos aspectos" (Fonseca, 2002, p. 33).

This type of interview was chosen because it enables the perception and analysis of interviewee's attitudes, gestures, and reactions, allowing access to more precise and immediate information (Marconi and Lakatos, 2002).

The survey was based on the *Critério de Classificação Econômica Brasil* (CCEB), a standard used to classify individuals socioeconomically based on their households and access to goods and services, aiming to understand the socioeconomic level of the interviewed subjects. It is highlighted that the same survey was applied in all four interviews; however, when using semi-structured interviews, different questions were directed to each participant, considering the specificities of their roles.

The interviewed subjects, representing different segments of the school community, were invited to sign the Informed Consent, acknowledging the research theme. It is highlighted that all necessary ethical procedures for research involving human subjects were adopted. To preserve identities, participants are referred to according to the roles they assume in the institution, without revealing their names.

The following participated in the research:

- Manager, with a graduate degree and five years of work in the institution;
- Teacher, undergraduate, working for 16 years in the school;
- Child Development Assistant (CDA), graduate, working in the institution for 12 years;
- Doorman, completed high school, working in the school for two months;
- Student's mom, undergraduate, whose child attended the institution for 8 months.

It must be noted that students were not interviewed, as children do not take part in the elaboration of the PPP.

For data analysis, content analysis was conducted, as described by Bardin (1977, p. 38, our translation), as "a set of techniques of communication analysis, using systematic procedures and goals of the messages' content description."⁶ This technique, used in qualitative data analysis, has as its characteristics objectivity, systematization, and inference, supported by indicators that may or may not be quantitative. The goal of this type of analysis is to understand the meanings behind words; through the work with collected data and their interpretation, raw data becomes meaningful.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, categorical analysis conducted on the data collected through the methods described above is presented. Initially, two categories were assumed, configured as the main axes of the research: the democratic management and the PPP. Later, two other categories emerged: the meetings promoted by CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas and the School Board, both of which can be understood, based on the collected data, as strong mechanisms of democratization within the institution.

ANALYSIS OF CENTRO MUNICIPAL DE EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL PROFESSOR PAULO ROSAS'S POLITICAL-PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT

The analysis shows that the PPP of CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas presents an objective and organized structure, demonstrating attention to detail, including explanations, for example, of the physical structure and the institution's functioning; the organization of environment rooms; the available working tools; the names of the workers and the activities they perform; and the neighborhood in which the institution is located.

⁶ In the original: "Um conjunto de técnicas de análise das comunicações, que utiliza procedimentos sistemáticos e objectivos de descrição do conteúdo das mensagens" (Bardin, 1977, p. 38).

In the document, a description of the principles guiding the institution can be found, such as participation, solidarity, social justice, equality, respect for differences, and protection of children against any kind of violence. The document is theoretically grounded, referring to legal frameworks that consider children as subjects with rights, as well as to the quality of education in daycares and schools and the need for community participation in daily life and decision-making within the institution.

The document's elaboration was carried out through collective work, involving joint effort of workers, families, and the local community. The adopted perspective in this process, as described in the document, rejects the imposition of guidelines by higher-level or normative bodies, privileging the voice and active participation of those involved in its implementation. This action aligns with Vianna (1986), who states that participatory planning must be built upon the integration of sectors.

The analysis showed the presence of a description of psychopedagogical foundations guiding the practices conducted in the educational unity, linked to concern with knowledge of the socio-cultural context of children and their families. The document describes that evaluation and planning processes must occur through the division of work groups (WGs), formed by representatives from different sectors and guardians to discuss specific themes, aiming to identify issues, solutions, and improvements that can be incorporated into the PPP — an action configured, according to Souza (2009), as a strong characteristic of democratic management.

It can be noted that the document assumes the role recommended by Article 14 of the LDB (Brasil, 1996), which highlights the relevance of the participation of education workers in the elaboration of the school's PPP. This commitment demonstrates adherence to the democratic perspective not only in theory, but also in the daily practice of school management.

HOW DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT APPEARS IN THE POLITICAL-PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT

In the last topic, we highlighted the PPP objective structure, defining its sections and how its conception occurred. In this topic, democratic management is presented within the guiding document of pedagogic practices in CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas.

It was found that the term “democratic management” appears twice in the whole document. The first occurrence appears in the introduction. In the context, it is emphasized that the PPP was collectively elaborated, aligned with democratic principles. In its initial feature, it highlights the relevance of the joint participation of different stakeholders interested in the elaboration and implementation of the PPP.

The term's second appearance is on page 12, in the topic on the School Council. The term appears within the conceptualization of the collegiate body, described as “one of the instances of social control. With the role of guaranteeing democratic management in the unity”⁷ (Recife, 2021, p. 12, our translation). The use of the concept of “democratic management” in the context of School Councils demonstrates the relevance of this organization as an essential component in promoting democracy in the management of the space. This mention reasserts that the active participation of diverse stakeholders, through the school council, is essential for the effective implementation of democratic principles in the conduction of activities in CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas.

Although the expression “democratic management” does not appear many times in the document, the emphasis on collective work suggests that democratic principles are intrinsically incorporated into the values of CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas. Democratic management, therefore, is more than just an expression; it is an approach that permeates the essence of the PPP and is reflected in diverse participatory instances described throughout it.

⁷ In the original: “Uma das instâncias de controle social. Tendo como competência garantir a gestão democrática da unidade” (Recife, 2021, p. 12).

DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT AND ITS STRENGTHENING MECHANISMS: THE SECTION ON THE SUBJECTS THAT COMPOSE THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

It is worth noting that, as described in the methodological section, the subjects interviewed in this research represent segments of the school community: teacher, CDA, manager, a students' mother, and the doorman. Moreover, the interviews were conducted individually, and different questions were asked according to the function performed by each subject within the institution.

The interviewees were asked what they understood by democratic management. The manager answered: "Security for us, as we do not feel so alone, and we feel safer, because everyone will be able to contribute and discuss the school's problems"⁸ (Gestora, 2023, our translation).

The teacher and the CDA agree that democratic management must be based on listening to all parts of the community and must include, mainly, the children, as, according to the teacher, their demands should come first when dealing with the organization of the educational environment.

Despite this, the representative of the parents interviewed reinforced the presence of participation in democratic management, explaining that when a problem is highlighted, parents and guardians must participate by expressing their ideas and opinions. She also cited her previous experience in another school with her other daughter, who does not study at CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas, describing a management that was, in her words, "antidemocratic"⁹ (Mother, 2023, our translation). The mother then considered that in this institution there is democratic management, pointing only to the constant change of interns as a negative factor that interferes with the adaptation of younger children.

The interviews presented are in agreement with Vieira (2007) and Pinheiro (2018), who highlight that there is an intrinsic relationship between democratic management and the social participation of the diverse groups that integrate the school community. The action of collectively discussing solutions to problems that arise in such an environment, as observed in the interviewees' responses, is a strong trait of this type of management (Souza, 2009).

Among the five people consulted, only the doorman could not answer the question. He justified his response by stating that he had not been working there for a long time, although he mentioned having experience in another educational institution. On this theme, it is inferred that the previous workplace of the doorman did not adopt a democratic culture that included workers in decision-making processes.

Due to the short period of work in the current position, and considering the aforementioned characteristics that differentiate CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas from other institutions in the city of Recife, it is concluded that each subject, upon joining the staff, undergoes initial training aimed at introducing the specificities that guide its functioning.

Currently, there is a normalization of the need for a democratic bias in school management, as previously mentioned throughout this paper. The interviewees were asked whether they were aware of any such laws. The manager cited the LDB (Brasil, 1996), referring to the role of the School Council, and the legal framework of the Recife city administration, which was also mentioned in the teacher's response: "There is a sector inside Recife's administration, that deals with democratic administration, from which comes Scholar Council's acting inside the school, right?"¹⁰ (Teacher, 2023, our translation). The PPP was cited in the CDA's response.

8 In the original: "*Segurança para a gente, a gente não se sente tão só, a gente se sente mais seguro, porque todo mundo vai poder contribuir e discutir os problemas mesmo da escola*" (Gestora, 2023).

9 In the original: "*Antidemocrática*" (Mother, 2023).

10 In the original: "*Tem um setor da própria prefeitura do Recife, que ela trata da gestão democrática, que é onde vem a atuação do Conselho Escolar dentro da escola, né?*" (Teacher, 2023).

From the responses obtained, considering the manager's experience, as well as that of the teacher and the CDA at CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas — respectively five, sixteen, and twelve years — it was expected that they would demonstrate greater knowledge of the official documents that legitimize democratic processes in education institutions, especially given the partnership with UFPE and the frequent debates on the theme in the Pedagogy course.

Regarding the manner of filling positions, the manager explained that she first assumed her role in another institution through nomination by the Department of Education of the City of Recife, due to her distinguished work in early childhood education, and was later transferred to her current institution, maintaining the same role.

Although election is the closest form of achieving a democratic bias (Mendonça, 2000), it is possible to observe, in the CMEI's organizational structure, the presence of organizations and actions that align with democracy, such as an active School Council and a PPP that is collectively constructed and frequently reevaluated. Thus, Silva (2007) and Marques (2012) are revisited, as they agree that the fact that a manager was not elected by the community does not preclude the existence of democratic characteristics within the institution.

Based on the observations, it was possible to identify that the institution is strongly supported by the School Council and by the promotion of community meetings for planning, which occur collectively, thereby strengthening the democratic bias linked to education.

SCHOOL COUNCIL

The collegiate bodies themselves as mechanisms that strengthen the presence of democratic management in educational institutions (Silva, 2007), since, as pointed out by Mendonça (2000), in these groups that represent the community, the role of the manager is not centralized. Therefore, following a question regarding laws that address democratic processes, the School Council emerged in the manager's and teacher's responses as one of the tools for the democratization of the school environment.

Regarding the meetings, the manager explained: "There is a council meeting, that happens at least once in two months and also extraordinary meetings, right?"¹¹ (Manager, 2023, our translation). Although interviews were conducted individually, the CDA's response presents a perspective similar to that of the manager, when she states: "It is an active scholar council, formed by workers, teachers, parents and the community"¹² (CDA, 2023, our translation).

The teacher explained that she is not a member of the Council, although she feels she is heard through her representative. Regarding this, the mother states that she does not understand how this kind of collegiate functions and explained: "I know that there is a representative for the class, but I don't know if that is it. And, generally, we have a group of parents, she is the responsible for informing everything that was debated in the meetings and so for the others"¹³ (Mother, 2023, our translation).

Although she does not have detailed knowledge about the functioning of the School Council, the mother's response indicates that she has access to information regarding the decisions made by the group. Thus, among the five interviewees, only the doorman reported that he was unaware of the existence of this collegiate body.

11 In the original: "*Tem uma reunião do conselho, que acontece pelo menos a cada 2 meses e tem reuniões extraordinárias, né?*" (Manager, 2023).

12 In the original: "*É um conselho escolar atuante, que é formado pelos funcionários, pelos professores, pais e comunidade*" (CDA, 2023).

13 In the original: "*Eu sei que tem uma representante da turma, não sei se seria isso. E, geralmente, a gente tem um grupo de pais, ela que repassa tudo para os demais o que foi debatido nas reuniões e tal*" (Mother, 2023).

The manager explained that the decision-making process in CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas occurs in meetings, mainly within the School Council, where guidelines are presented and members discuss possible solutions collectively. In this regard, she emphasized: “You do not stay alone, right?” You got support from the group that is with you”¹⁴ (Manager, 2023, our translation).

Since leadership is an inseparable trait of management (Luck, 2010), the practice of dialogue within the community regarding improvements to the environment and solutions to problems affecting it must be valued and encouraged in educational institutions, as it prevents an authoritarian scenario and promotes a mobilizing management approach.

In this sense, raising awareness within the community about the relevance of active participation in decision making processes, through the School Council, for example, is essential for the construction of an environment that responds, in the best possible way, to the interests of the majority, thereby contributing to the guarantee of the right to a socially referenced quality education.

MEETINGS

To understand how the school community is inserted in the process of elaborating participative planning, the interviewees were asked the frequency of meetings in the institution and whether they take part in them. The teacher comments on the existence of different types of meetings, such as weekly planning meetings of the teaching team, evaluation meetings, meetings scheduled in the Calendar of Recife’s administration, which gather the whole team, and pedagogical councils.

Beyond the aforementioned meetings, the CDA explains that there are annual meetings for the evaluation and update of the PPP: “In this day there is not a school day, and is done in great groups, that groups all the classes and is later organized in smaller groups”¹⁵ (CDA, 2023, our translation). These meetings, which happen at the start of the school year, count on the presence of the school community. Regarding the presence of parents, the manager states: “It is going to be a process of updating the PPP, that invites them, right? Could you come with us to take part in this elaboration”¹⁶ (Manager, 2023, our translation). Still regarding the presence of parents in meetings for the update of the PPP, the teacher states: “We have moments focused on those who are inside the school, as well as there are moments for the whole community, right?”¹⁷ (Teacher, 2023, our translation).

However, the mother states that she took part, until October 2023, in only two meetings, which consisted of individual meetings with the teacher to follow her child’s development. She also explains that she usually receives updates about what happens and impacts the institution’s functioning, such as strikes and lack of workers, through the parents’ group on the WhatsApp platform.

The doorman stated that he did not take part in any kind of meeting or decision-making processes until October, justifying it by the short period he has been working in the institution, around two months. Although a relatively short time, it is inferred that the doorman could have taken part in one of the School Council meetings, which happen once every two months, or even in an internal team meeting, if there were greater concern regarding the training of newly arrived outsourced workers.

Beyond the Scholar Council and the distinct types of meetings, which work as tools for guaranteeing the presence of parents in the institution, the manager points out that they are invited

14 In the original: “*Você não fica sozinha, né? Você tem um respaldo de um grupo que está com você*” (Manager, 2023).

15 In the original: “*Nesse dia não tem o dia letivo e faz em grandes grupos, que aí reúne todas as turmas e depois em pequenos grupos*” (CDA, 2023).

16 In the original: “*Vai ter um processo de atualização de PPP, se convida também, né? Vocês podem vir participar com a gente dessa construção*” (Manager, 2023).

17 In the original: “*a gente tem momentos só dos segmentos que estão dentro da escola, como a gente também tem momentos que é a comunidade como um todo, né?*” (Teacher, 2023).

to take part in daily activities, as expressed in her answer: [...] we have some permanent moments already in the daily schedule, in a way that the good morning, and the good afternoon activities, the teachers always are inviting some of the families”¹⁸ (Manager, 2023, our translation). The mother agrees with this statement, giving the example: “There was a week of the children, when you who work with theatre, make a play for the children”¹⁹ (Mother, 2023, our translation).

Regarding the articulation between the school and the community, Libâneo (2004) points out that it is an action that is the manager’s responsibility. Therefore, the data obtained show that the interaction movement, favored by the different types of meetings adopted by the CMEI in question, enables the establishment of close dialogue between management and the school community, which can serve as an example for other institutions that seek to experience this kind of horizontal relationship, where management does not occupy a central place.

POLITICAL-PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT: A PARTICIPATIVE SCHOLAR PLANNING

This section seeks to characterize the planning and identify its functions for the construction of a democratic school environment. Through the interviews, information was obtained about the elaboration of the PPP, as well as the interviewees’ conceptions of the document.

When asked what she understands by a PPP, the teacher states: “It is it that strengthens, and justifies my actions, right? It is a greater document, supreme in the school, right? It is in it that this place’s identity is, right?”²⁰ (Teacher, 2023, our translation). The teacher sees the document as guidance for her work within the institution, believing that it must be followed faithfully.

Moreover, the teacher explains that the choices made inside classrooms cannot be made individually, because there is a collective decision on how to deal with the most diverse situations. These choices are evidenced by Dalmas (1997), who supports participative planning built upon community decisions, that is, when the interests of the majority are considered.

The CDA, when asked about the PPP, explains that she knows of its existence and relevance to the school and that she takes part in the annual meetings that modify it, which happen on the first day of the school year, still without the presence of the children. Regarding the PPP, she states: “Not all daycares have a PPP, and not all daycares follow their PPP, and we can do it without a problem”²¹ (CDA, 2023, our translation). This answer shows that the document is a tool that is used, which aligns with Veiga’s (1998) idea that the PPP should not only must fulfill a bureaucratic role, being completed and then forgotten.

Regarding the elaboration of the PPP, the teacher explains that it took six years to be completed and that it was made collectively. She affirms that the School Council was a relevant mean of communication, contributing to the realization of collective work. Therefore, the elaboration, evaluation, and collective execution of the PPP are characterized as conditions for the existence of democracy within the school (Silva, 2007).

When asked about meetings in the CMEI, the teacher reveals: “We also have specific meetings just to update the PPP, right? To revisit, replan, and redrive”²² (Teacher, 2023, our translation). These modifications, added as needs arise, make the document an ongoing process,

18 In the original: “A gente tem alguns momentos permanentes já na rotina, do jeito que a atividade do bom dia, boa tarde, sempre as professoras estão convidando algumas famílias” (Manager, 2023).

19 In the original: “Teve a semana da criança, então você que trabalha com teatro, traz o teatro para as crianças” (Mother, 2023).

20 In the original: “É ele que fortalece, é ele que justifica as minhas ações, né? É o documento maior, supremo de uma escola, né? É nele que está a identidade daquele local, né?” (Teacher, 2023).

21 In the original: “Nem toda creche tem o PPP, nem toda creche segue o PPP e isso a gente consegue, numa boa” (CDA, 2023).

22 In the original: “A gente também tem encontros específicos só para atualização do PPP, né? Para visitar, replanejar, reconduzir” (Professora, 2023).

according to Gadotti and Romão (1997). She also affirmed that she was present in all meetings concerning PPP modifications, except in 2012, when she was on maternity leave in November of that year.

On the other hand, both the doorman and the mother claimed to not know what the PPP is about. The doorman's response can be explained by the fact that meetings concerning this document occur at the beginning of the school year, when he was not yet working at the institution. The mother, although it is her daughter's first year at the CMEI, had enough time to take part in meetings regarding it; however, there is no information on whether these meetings did not occur or whether she did not attend them.

The manager explains her understanding of the PPP: "It is the foot base of the school. Then, without it we do not have an identity, there is no life. We lose our path, we get lost, right?"²³ (Manager, 2023, our translation). Throughout her response, she expressed the understanding that the whole school community should take part in its elaboration, highlighting the diversity of themes present in the PPP and their relevance to the institution's actions.

In meetings that addressed questions concerning the PPP, the manager explains that parents are invited, but they do not usually attend the annual meetings held at the beginning of the school year for evaluation: "In the day that we go to debate updates, even if we do not expect much of families, they need to understand clearly the school principles, and the pedagogic principles"²⁴ (Manager, 2023, our translation).

Regarding this, it is highlighted that inviting parents to take part in meetings that discuss the PPP is highly relevant, as, like other segments, they have significant influence on the decision-making process (Silva, 2021). Therefore, Luck (2006) reasserts the need for all involved to be aware of their influence and power over outcomes within the school environment.

Data collected through the interviews show that the PPP of CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas is perceived as a crucial tool in building a school environment open to community participation. The collective elaboration of the document, involving all sectors, combined with constant revisiting and reevaluation, reasserts its active and dynamic nature. The PPP, therefore, not only promotes, but also supports the active and continuous participation of the school community in building and improving the educational environment.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The research aimed to evaluate participative school planning as a tool for the democratization of management, having as its locus CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas. After mapping the instruments of school planning used by the management, it was possible to identify the different kinds of meetings promoted by the institution as a strong instrument, in which school planning is collectively elaborated.

Seeking to characterize the elaboration of this planning, it can be stated that it occurs in a collaborative way, with the presence of the school community, and undergoes constant updates, without remaining static, but rather being mutable and adaptable according to the needs that arise during the school year. Regarding the identification of the functions of participative planning for the construction of a school environment that is also democratic, the democratization of decision-making underlies the developed pedagogical practices, the organization of spaces, and the daily dynamics.

23 In the original: "*É a base de sustentação da escola. Assim, sem ele a gente não tem identidade, não tem vida. A gente fica sem rumo, fica perdido, né?*" (Gestora, 2023).

24 In the original: "*No dia que a gente vai debater uma atualização, mesmo que não conte tanto com as famílias, as famílias precisam ter clareza quais são os princípios da escola, os princípios pedagógicos*" (Gestora, 2023).

The results obtained indicate that, although not all interviewees were familiar with the PPP of CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas, it is a living document since its creation. Some years after its implementation, it continues to be relevant to the functioning of the institution — an aspect that reflects the institution's commitment to the democratic principles established in the legislation in the field and that may serve as a model for other early childhood education institutions.

The PPP appears as a central element of the democratic processes of CMEI Professor Paulo Rosas because, through the ideal of collective elaboration among the segments that compose the school community, the document brings together a set of themes of common interest.

It is worth mentioning that this research is a case study of an institution with relevant particularities; however, the results obtained show that democratic experiences occur mainly through the constant mobilization of management, which promotes the articulation of the school community while maintaining leadership without authoritarianism.

Thus, the applied methodology can be used to analyze the realities of other CMEIs in Recife, as well as those in other cities of Pernambuco and beyond this context, aiming to understand how management is characterized in different settings, as occurs with the concept of democracy in education.

This research also supported the understanding of a model of educational institution that moves toward the democratization of educational spaces beyond the present context. However, one aspect that deserves further attention is the absence of children in meetings to update the PPP. This gap is presented as a suggestion for future research, which may investigate the role of children in the elaboration of tools to sustain the democratization of school practices.

In conclusion, the research demonstrated that the democratic orientation in the formation of a school community is evident. Through the analysis of the PPP and the participative methodology adopted by management, this study provided an overview of how democratization of school management can be effective, contributing to the promotion of an educational environment that is participative and aligned with democratic principles. The collective and representative elaboration of the PPP indicates that it remains highly necessary.

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