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Meanings of Democracy in the School Space¹

Sentidos da Democracia no Espaço Escolar

Significados de la Democracia en el Espacio Escolar

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Abstract: This research aimed to apprehend the conceptions and practices of democracy / democratization that emerge in the daily life of the school. Methodologically, we conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the School Council, that is, seven interviewees from a public school of the Municipal Education Network of Maceió/Alagoas, with the purpose of perceiving the conceptions of democracy and participation. Therefore, for treatment and analysis of the data, we used content analysis, according to the suggestions that are found in Bardin (1977). The results of the research pointed out that we have characterized in the Alagoas school and, in general, Brazilian, an institutionalized democracy, which is representative democracy, a model criticized by Rancière (2014) and that generates in society a conformism, distancing itself from democracy as dissent.

Keywords: Democracy; Participation; School.

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Resumo: A presente pesquisa objetivou apreender as concepções e práticas de democracia/democratização que emergem no cotidiano da escola. Metodologicamente, realizamos entrevista semi-estruturada com integrantes do Conselho da Escola, ou seja, sete entrevistados de uma escola pública da Rede Municipal de Educação de Maceió/Alagoas, com o propósito de perceber as concepções de democracia e participação. Assim sendo, para tratamento e análise dos dados, utilizamos a análise de conteúdo, de acordo com as sugestões que são encontradas em Bardin (1977). Os resultados da pesquisa apontaram que temos caracterizado na escola alagoana e, em geral, brasileira, uma democracia institucionalizada, que é a democracia representativa, modelo criticado por Rancière (2014) e que gera na sociedade um conformismo, distanciando-se da democracia como dissenso.

Palavras-chave: Democracia; Participação; Escola.

Resumen: Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo aprehender las concepciones y prácticas de democracia/democratización que emergen en la vida cotidiana de la escuela. Metodológicamente, realizamos entrevistas semiestructuradas con miembros del Consejo Escolar, es decir, siete entrevistados de una escuela pública de la Red Municipal de Educación de Maceió/Alagoas, con el propósito de percibir las concepciones de democracia y participación. Por lo tanto, para el tratamiento y análisis de los datos, se utilizó el análisis de contenido, de acuerdo con las sugerencias que se encuentran en Bardin (1977). Los resultados de la investigación señalaron que hemos caracterizado en la escuela de Alagoas y, en general, brasileña, una democracia institucionalizada, que es democracia representativa, un modelo criticado por Rancière (2014) y que genera en la sociedad un conformismo, distanciándose de la democracia como disidencia.

Palabras clave: Democracia; Participación; Escuela.

Initial Considerations

Brazilian society, since its origin, has been marked by the conservative and authoritarian experience in social relations, although established in the course of processes of construction of the democratic regime and citizenship.

This historical trajectory implies the formation of the Brazilian people and culture, which has occurred through democratizing mechanisms, which, however, have not produced sufficient effects to solve the problems of exclusion and social inequalities that have been worsening.

The proclaimed consensus that it is necessary to build more participatory forms of articulation of the interests and conceptions of the different social segments, including within the school, does not seem to be consistent for the consolidation of the democratic management underway in schools. This effort is reflected in the planning of public policies, legislation and the implementation of a set of educational policies from the 1990s onwards that, in our view, run up against the country's political tradition, marked by a strong paternalistic culture. In this way, one experiences social relations that are accommodated to bossiness, instead of resonating through the active participation of the population.

Given this problem, the motivation to reflect on democracy in the reality of public schools is justified, because it's understood not only as a principle, but as a practice that should be the result of the conquest of citizens as a right. In practice, a formal democracy is consolidated, the mechanisms of which are not yet consolidated as a substantive democracy.

In the Brazilian school we have legally implemented the democratic instruments of participation and collective decision-making such as the expanded collegiate, the presence of the community in the instances of the school, the pedagogical political project and the direct election in the choice of the representatives of the direction and school council, which implies accepting and working with the differences and with the dissenting voices.

Therefore, we start from the assumption that democracy is a public and cultural good, although the legal apparatus is necessary for its installation. But the legitimation of democratic practices requires a broad process of disputes and consensus, of dialogues and conflicts in favor of a project of society.

These aspects led to the following question: How do the meanings attributed to democracy contribute to the transformation of practices? What is the contribution of the local political culture in the construction of democratic practices in the space of the public school?

In this perspective, the research sought to apprehend conceptions and practices of democracy that emerge in the daily life of the school. To this end, the article begins with a brief characterization of the empirical investigation, whose data require a theoretical reflection on the concepts of democracy and participation in the daily practice of the subjects in the public space of the school.

Definition of the field and method of research

The type of research we developed was of a qualitative nature, of the case study type. We developed bibliographic research to understand the object of study, since it's important to dive into the literature that portrays the assumptions of democracy / democratization of society and education. The choice for this type of research is based on the understanding that this is:

Performed to theoretically substantiate the object of study, contributing with elements that support the future analysis of the data obtained. Therefore, it differs from the bibliographic review since it goes beyond the simple observation of data contained in the sources researched, because it imprints on them the theory, the critical understanding of the meaning in them existing (LIMA and MIOTO, 2007, p. 44).

In this way, we offer subsidies for the elaboration of data collection instruments, as well as for their analysis. We conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the school council, seeking to apprehend their conceptions of democracy and participation. The definition by the school council is justified because it is an instrument of participation and political decision within it and because the members are chosen from the perspective of democratic management, that is, through direct election.

We selected a municipal public school in Maceió, Alagoas, because it's a social reality permeated by social contrasts and in which social participation encounters many social, political and cultural barriers.

The school was chosen because it is located in a noble neighborhood that, from the geographical, social and political point of view, has good organization from the point of view of the offer of citizenship goods, such as public transportation, lighting, sanitation, asphalt, (well organized) and with an educational level of the population considered higher, conditions that, hypothetically, favor the development of a more accurate critical sense about reality.

For the purpose of presenting the data we call it the School of the Mermaid (*Escola da Sereia*), thus identifying the beautiful beaches that characterize the place. This school presents the basic mechanisms for promoting community participation, such as election for the choice of the school manager, the class and school council, school bylaws and general assembly, configuring, therefore, as democratic.

The subjects interviewed were the general director, the assistant director, an employee, a teacher, a mother and two students, totaling seven subjects. It is noteworthy that all interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, safeguarding the confidentiality and anonymity of the information.

For the treatment and analysis of the data we used content analysis, according to the suggestions that are found in Bardin (1977), having as reference the categories initially privileged by the research (democracy, participation and democratic management).

Limits of democracy in school

In the defense of education for democracy, Teixeira (1994, p. 99) seeks to break with a model of society marked by social and educational inequalities, based on the privilege of the few, pointing to secular school education and the strengthening of public education.

In a society like ours, traditionally marked by a deep class spirit and privilege, only the public school will be truly democratic and only it can have a common training program, without the prejudices against certain forms of work essential to democracy. (TEIXEIRA, 1999, p. 99).

The author advocates the expansion of a *democratic consciousness*, in an effort to extend education to all. For this purpose, it alerts to the need for a new educational policy based on the democratic principle, which requires “solid common education, to be given in primary school, with a complete curriculum and full school day” (TEIXEIRA, 1994, p. 104). It states, therefore, that education is the basis for citizenship and equal opportunities, in order to become autonomous in relation to family heritage.

For better clarification, Teixeira (1994) warned about the importance of the right to education for all, starting with access to primary education (today defined as elementary school), but expanding the need for a universalizing educational policy, that is to guarantee access to education for the entire population, thus strengthening the democratic principles of citizenship and equality.

The scope of such ideals, however, still seems distant from reality, but remains in the discourse of several researchers, who add their justifications, such as Benevides (1996), for whom political education is fundamental for the development of a nation, which relates to two dimensions: “The formation for republican and democratic values and the formation for political decision-making at all levels” (p. 226). This author highlights the distinction between democratic education and education for democracy:

Education for democracy is not to be confused either with democratization of education - which is certainly a presupposition - nor with democratic education. The latter is a necessary, but not sufficient, means of obtaining that one. The truth is that, without a doubt, a democratically constituted organization can develop, at the pedagogical

level, without including specific education for democracy (BENEVIDES, 1996, p. 227).

It is perceived that political education constitutes the premise of a broad, political and social process that involves the formation of the free and democratic citizen which, in summary, results in education for democracy. In addition, it emphasizes that education for democracy should take place in school, as a privileged locus of education / training.

Although his defense is echoed by so many authors, one of the weaknesses of democracy in Brazil concerns social rights that have been reduced to political rights, but specifically the right to vote distant from the democratic experience related to the economic and social aspects concerning the project of society. Lima (2008, p. 93) clarifies that “this is because democracy has always been a threat to the project of capital (even in the case of bourgeois democracy)”.

Lima (2013) understands that democracy and democratic management are constructions of the working class.

Democracy is present with institutionalized participation in the school, through elections of principals, School Councils and Parents' and Teachers' Associations. On the other hand, demobilization, the demotivation of participation and the consequent emptying of democratization is part of conservative capitalist practices (LIMA, 2013, p. 36).

Estevão (2004) presents some challenges posed to education, among which the idea that the taking of political options for democracy requires privileging the critical reference that refers to the commitment to social justice. This requires, among other aspects, the reintroduction of the concern for ethics and for a pedagogy “that rescues the other” and that wages the “struggle to occupy a space of hope” (p. 128).

The author relates democracy to the rule of law, arguing that the normative dimension of justice is a fundamental issue involving the relationship between state and justice:

The State remains a necessary instrument of justice and the place par excellence from which citizens expect justice and equal treatment in all spheres of the social domain, regardless of their place in the social structure. It is then up to the State that wants to be democratic, to intervene in the sense that society establishes itself as an adult political

community, contributing first of all so that it's just, solidary and free (ESTEVÃO, 2004, p. 125).

These challenges require changes in the form of organization and agreements that are necessary in a complex organization such as the school. In this direction, SANTOS and BOTLER (2013, p. 05), discussing the policies of democratization of education in the school environment, point to education as one of the policies of social cut:

They are marked by the presence of varied discourses in dispute, since with each new administration, whether municipal or state, we continuously witness movements of reformulation of proposals, theoretical-methodological changes that seek to impress the mark of governments in each period, which, in our view, hinders the consolidation of State policies, leaving them at the mercy of governments, disadvantaging continuity.

In the context of the problematic of what is understood as democracy in school, the authors still defend that “democratization is not defined by force of decree, or simply by the adoption of mechanisms such as voting, for example, but is consolidated with the daily practices inscribed in the action of managers” (SANTOS & BOTLER, 2013, p. 07) and of all social subjects participating in the school space. The school is conceived as a public space in which discussions emerge around political and educational issues that directly or indirectly involve all its segments, expanding the vision of education and knowledge produced collectively in the social practices experienced in their daily lives.

We start from the understanding that the materialization of democracy has a direct correlation with the social and political culture historically instituted in Brazilian society, which is modified through the experiences lived by social subjects and their degree of organization/claim in public spaces in the exercise of democracy. In this sense, there is a tenuous relationship between democratic value and the practice (commitment) to democracy in the daily life of the school. This relationship can be observed in the case of the school, for example, when:

Some subjects demonstrate that the administrative responsibility lies with the manager, thus justifying a certain lack of commitment, which can be interpreted as distance from the democratic value. On the other hand, engaged subjects, attentive to people's behaviors, seek to enforce their own principles (BOTLER, 2010, p. 191).

This movement in the scope of participation and concrete engagement in the school can signal that “power relations are constituted in each context, in each culture, and they can configure, or not, the democratic school”. (BOTLER, 2010, p. 192).

With regard to participation in schools, the concept has been associated with participatory management as a mechanism for its democratization, which demands “greater participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process of the school, also involving them in the accomplishment of multiple management tasks” (LÜCK *et al.*, 1998). In this sense, the amplitude that the perspective of democratic management brings to the daily life of the school, provokes substantial changes in the social relations established in the public school space.

Paro (1997) adds that democratic management in the school should not be limited to participation in decisions, since “this does not eliminate, obviously, participation in execution; but neither does it have it as an end, but as a means, when necessary, for participation itself, which is the sharing of power, participation in decision-making” (p. 16). Participation, therefore, underlies the idea of “sharing” and, when the reference is the governmental machine, it supposes the possibility of interaction between civil society actors and the State, which can assume different dynamics, which generate different results (JACOBI, 1990).

Bordenave (1987), when calling attention to the various ways of participating, refers to the imposed participation, which is that in which individuals are obliged to be part of groups and to perform tasks considered indispensable. It also refers to directed participation, which is provoked by external agents, who manipulate the participants in order to achieve their own objectives, previously established, as well as the participation granted, which is represented by part of the power of influence exercised by subordinates and which legitimizes the practices of those who delegate this power to them, while creating an “illusion” of participation.

When discussing some limits of democracy in the school with the support of these authors, we highlight that participation implies democratic practices experienced by the community in the world outside the school, and that they find in the democratizing mechanisms, such as the councils, another channel of action. At the same time, in the case of a public space linked to municipal or state political power, schools have to have their decisions recognized and respected by this power, according to the norms of the

democratic game, because, only in this way, democratic practices will spring up and be rooted in the public management of education.

Democratic school management in the Brazilian reality: Discourse or practice?

One of the references we assume for the discussion on education and democracy refers to the ideas of Elie Ghanem (2004), which we consider pertinent for reflection on the field of school politics and management.

The attempt to relate school education and democracy will be confused with the history of Brazilian school education throughout the 20th century, mainly as a way of thinking about the establishment of the public education system (GHANEM, 2004). In this sense, the author justifies the study by stating that:

Originally, the idea around which the study would be carried out was to verify whether participation in school management could be considered an acceptable way of improving public education. It seemed natural and even automatic to answer this question in the affirmative, since the expression 'democratic school management' had already been incorporated into the jargon of university circles and public authorities responsible for school networks. But the recurrent school practices did not indicate walking in the same direction of this language. In addition, several studies have insistently shown the difficulties of democratizing the management of school units and, even more, of the systems they compose. Therefore, it became relevant to examine the possible contributions that a political (participatory) approach would bring to the quality of educational activities and, thus, to understand the importance of this approach in the context of the country's school challenges (GHANEM, 2004, p. 15).

An issue worth highlighting is the very concept of democracy elaborated by the author, which we believe to be pertinent when he states that:

Democracy is a culture and not just a set of institutional guarantees, since it's an institutional system that allows a society to be simultaneously one and diverse (GHANEM, 2004, p. 22).

The author presents three dimensions that constitute democracy and that contain in itself an interdependence, namely: Respect for fundamental rights, citizenship and the representativeness of leaders. For the author, democracy requires change in the very model of republican school education that was implemented in the 20th century in Brazil

(and that prevails until today - emphasis added) and, therefore, needs to be reviewed if in fact he wants to account for the current needs of training and culture.

In another perspective of analysis, Oliveira (2009) starts from the understanding that democracy does not consist only of a political regime, but of a social system in which there must be recognition and mutual respect of different social groups. Starting from this premise, for us to have an effective action in the construction of social democracy in the set of its demands, it is necessary “not only the socialization of the means of economic production, but also of the means of political decision-making, in addition to the democratization of the systems of authority in all spheres of social life” (p. 26).

Oliveira (2009), when discussing the production of democracy in the school, calls attention that, if it is not from the school that society is transformed, certainly “the changes that we can produce within the school itself already modify the social system by expanding effective democracy and modifying institutional aspects that are part of it” (p. 28).

For this to happen, there must be an autonomous participation of the various segments in the decision-making processes and, therefore,

it's necessary that the members of these diverse social groups may have developed some autonomy as individuals, which makes the process of building democracy a permanent entanglement between individual achievements and social advances, mutually influential by each other (OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 26).

Another analysis that we consider interesting about Democracy in Brazil is based on the arguments developed by Cervi (2013), which highlights the centrality that democracy assumed in the debate with society in the 1980s and the requirement of the “school as a place to learn to exercise democracy” (p. 107), as well as the close relationship between this and the social function of the school.

The author seeks to problematize the discursive practices on democratic school management without the pretension of criticizing and pointing out what is democratic management or what it is to be a democratic manager, but to think about “what we are from the school and how we recognize ourselves as democratic managers” (CERVI, 2013, p. 183).

In summary, it concludes that:

In the name of autonomy, freedom, participation, democracy, everyone is being educated to be good, docile, useful and participatory, passive, managerial. The promise of democratic management, whose conditions do not exist, appears as the salvation of the school. Democratic management works to capture, to control what the school administration has not been able to discipline (CERVI, 2013, p. 187).

Thus, the author's intention was not to simply criticize the model of democratic school management, but to think about the management and school practices that are being produced in the name of democracy.

Given the above, it should be noted that we are not opposed to democratic school management, but it is important to demystify that what we now call democratic management, may be masking a conservative, paternalistic and private interest practice in the name of democracy. It is necessary to be careful, because the discourses of decentralization, participation, autonomy and democracy can be fallacious, when these can reveal the opposite, that is, the centralization of decisions, control, protected participation and the restriction to a representative democracy.

Jacques Rancière clarifies that “democracy, in the strict sense of this term, is the power of the people, the power of anyone, of those who are not destined to the exercise of power by birth, wealth, scientific knowledge or any special quality” (JORNAL O GLOBO).

In presenting his conception of democracy, Rancière (2014), in his work “The hatred of democracy” in which he presents criticisms of representative democracy, starts from a position contrary to the minimalist idea of current democracy:

Actually existing democracies do not make the slightest point that collective wills be built. For them, it's enough to formally admit that parliaments are places where political pluralism has its place. Citizens are accustomed to believing in the democratic slogan that representative assemblies are the reflection of society (MENDONÇA & VIEIRA JÚNIOR, 2014, p. 112).

From this critique of representative democracy, Rancière starts from the conception of democracy as dissent, that is, “the experience of the distance of things. Such distance represents the moment in which man acts so that his voice can be heard, but always remaining at an adequate distance” (MENDONÇA and VIEIRA JÚNIOR, 2014, p. 113). It is through dissent that politics occurs. In this sense, democracy for Rancière can thus be expressed:

Democracy originates in the manifestation of the subjects in the rupture produced by dissent. In the scene of dissent, politics takes its place as a subjectivation of the rupture of the common meaning of social space by the police order. In the conflict that characterizes politics, in the tension between the structured social body, where everything has its place previously determined by the police order, and what escapes this order (which is not structured), there is a disturbance of the social order hitherto established. In the clash between the structure of the social body and a singularity that destabilizes its a sense of universality, politics takes place as a consequence of democracy opportunized by dissent (MENDONÇA & VIEIRA JÚNIOR, 2014, p. 120).

Democracy, understood as the political action of the *demos*, takes place in a process of argumentation, on the one hand, and, on the other, of dramatization. Argumentation refers to the subject of speech, who can be heard and, therefore, presents a power of argumentation, of convincing. On the other hand, dramatization (or theatrical scene) concerns subjects who may be who they are but may be something else, which implies that these subjects go beyond the name and place to which they have been assigned by the consensual order. In other words, to act in the field of politics or exercise power, one does not necessarily have to be an expert or someone who masters the entire administrative process. Anyone can exercise this place.

There is no political life, but political scene. Political action consists of showing as political what is seen as social, economic or domestic. It consists of blurring the boundaries. This is what happens when "domestic" agents - workers or women, for example - reconfigure their struggle/dispute as a struggle concerning the common, that is, concerning which place they belong or not and who is able or incapable of uttering utterances and making demonstrations about the common (RANCIÈRE, 2011 *Apud* LELO and MARQUES, 2014, p. 351).

Rancière also draws attention to what is at stake in democracy and politics, as well as embracing the concept of equality and emancipation. Emancipation is understood according to him as follows:

Those who emancipate themselves have done so, and do so, by claiming and practicing a way of thinking, speaking and living, which was not or is not 'theirs', which was not or is not appropriate, which does not correspond to their birth, their destiny, their proper nature. The act of emancipation is the decision to speak and think from the assumption of the equality of intelligences, the decision that the person has the capacity and the time that one does not have properly, according to the

current order and the sharing of the sensible (MASSCHELEIN and SIMONS, 2014, p. 87).

Bringing more elements to the understanding of democracy, Masschelein and Simons (2014, p. 139-140) point out that for Rancière:

Democracy is the power of those who have no power, of those who have no qualifications⁴ in a particular social or governmental order, of those who do not share what should be shared in society, community, society, or social order. When these 'unqualified' intervene, they install a dissent, that is, they demonstrate and verify that they are intellectually equal in the very act of intervention, and competent in view of the common good from which, however, they are excluded.

In other words, democracy is the meaning attributed to the expression *vita democrática*, to which we add the question: Is the school prepared for the exercise of the *vita democrática*? Rancière helps build the answer:

If we consider democracy as the process by which each one can assert his equality without the need for a special qualification or a certain level of intelligence, then schools as factories of qualification (which regard differences in qualification as the verification of inequality) seem to articulate a completely opposite logic. Democracy dissociates the concepts of capacity and intelligence from the concept of qualification, the logic of the school seems to do the opposite [...] there is a fear that schools may actually become places where democracy occurs, that is, a place where there is no natural reason (intelligence, for example) or social reason (financial condition, for example) on which the exercise of power or the justification of differences can be based (MASSCHELEIN and SIMONS, 2014, p. 145-146).

From this perspective, we understand that in the reality of the Brazilian school, strongly guided by meritocracy, by intelligence as something given (natural) and in the logic of the explanation of someone who knows and another who does not know,

⁴Specific qualifications refer to wealth, wisdom, knowledge, or birth.

according to Rancière this school produces inequalities and distances itself from being a place of democracy.

Assuming the school for democracy to be the school of equality, it's thus defined:

The school of equality is not an egalitarian school or a meritocratic school; it's neither a school that aims for equal outcomes, nor a school that offers equal opportunities. The form of the school includes an assumption or opinion of equality in placing students in a new time, and again in an equal position to begin with. It's the school in which we would say that 'democratic' moments can arise, where teachers and students are exposed to each other as equals in relation to a book, a text, a thing (MASSCHELEIN and SIMONS, 2014, p. 119).

Finally, democratic school management distances itself from the school of equality, an unreal school in which only "democratic" moments can arise, if we think about the Brazilian reality, which still presents traces of clientelist practices arising from the process of sociability in society and education.

Democracy and participation from the perspective of school subjects

We present in this item the conceptions of the school subjects, which is delineated from their experiences of democracy in everyday life, unveiling the content of the practices carried out there.

The central problem that we sought to apprehend from the research subjects consisted of knowing what they understand by democracy and how it's perceived / experienced in the daily life of the school and society.

The perception about democracy among the subjects was varied and revealed the level of maturity and experience they have with democracy and its materialization. In this sense, it is worth mentioning here that we do not pretend to make value judgments about what is right or the best definition. The idea is to perceive, from their experience with democracy, what it represents in the face of the challenges of an institution such as the school.

In this sense, the main issue that permeated the entire research concerns the understanding that the subjects have of democracy and its forms of manifestation in school practice. When we asked what they meant by democracy, they said:

I understand that she is favorable because from the moment I have right, turn and voice, I can choose what is best, I can opine. I don't just need to receive determinations unilaterally. So there's this two-way street. I work here in favor of the choice of the majority with the collective vision (Manager).

In itself democracy is what our country would be, a democratic country. Unfortunately, we are seeing that in practice it's quite different, but democracy is as if you have your opinion, you can defend yourself without suffering anything, isn't that it? And have the free will of you to give your opinion (Teacher).

I understand that democracy is when we can participate, right? It's a set of participatory people. So that, the sum of that gives democracy (Official).

Democracy today, I think so, you know, has everything to do with politics (Mother).

My right begins when his ends, right? Democracy is this because we think that everyone has their right, right? (Student).

It is perceived that the notion of democracy that permeates the discourse of the subjects is representative democracy as one in which participation is guaranteed as a legal right of all. Democracy as politics (understood as party politics), synthesizes the idea that the manifestation of citizenship occurs in those "democratic" moments in which we choose our representatives, guaranteeing the right to voice and vote.

The predominant conception of democracy in the discourses of the research subjects is defined by institutionalized democratic school management, that is, one that dispenses with participation through the representation of segments of the school community, which decides on administrative, financial and pedagogical processes in the school.

In a critical position, Rancière warns that representative democracy leads people to commodity and not necessarily to an action resulting from a critical position on society / education.

An important question that we seek to know from the subjects of the school is what they understand by participation. About this we highlight the following extracts:

Participation, theoretically it's very pleasant in our eyes, we read, seeing the theory, the instances that participate, where the principal, he alone, does not make the decisions, he alone does not manage the unit, he counts on the partnership of the various segments of the school community that, with this, is not a unilateral position, the

determinations, but, in theory it's one thing and in practice another (Manager).

We seek precisely this participation, not only from the employees, the management, the responsible parents and the students themselves (Teacher).

I try very hard to involve the parents of the students in the school because I am committed to the school (Employee).

The participation here I like and whenever there is the meeting I'm in and I like it. I always like to participate (Mother).

I, when I see the wrong things, I say, right? (Student).

From the extracts above, it's verified that there is a consensus on the importance of the participation of all segments in the school. In general, in the discourses, the subjects are available to participate in school. The question that remains is the quality of that participation. That is, does the participation reflect a spontaneous practice of the subjects, their will / interest in following the projects at school, or is it a more formal, bureaucratic issue?

It seems to us that the participation/presence so much proclaimed in the discourses is more about meeting the requirements of democratic management, such as the formation of the school council and a punctual performance, than even a critical and propositional participation of the subjects in the face of daily challenges.

Analyzing this issue in more detail, other elements also appear about how participation in the day-to-day life of the school occurs, such as, for example, participation in the understanding of the student segment, which associates participating with complaining and demanding for the school management the resolution of problems. This posture reinforces the idea and practice impregnated in the Brazilian social imaginary of representative democracy, where I delegate to others the solution of a situation.

I went several times also to complain about events that occurred and they went on that scheduled date, they went to the board to be able to pass on what we were complaining, fan, outlet, student who does not want to study, then we have to do something (Student).

However, the segment of school management exposes the contradictions of democracy that requires participation, engagement in the debate and in the resolution of the problems faced daily in the school.

Practice is quite far removed from this theory. Because the people who make up these segments, they're not as available. They want democracy, they want to have the right of time and voice, but they do not make available from themselves the time necessary to be present in the decisions, in the organization, in the daily activities (Manager).

Still reinforcing the idea of representative democracy strongly impregnated in people, the mother's testimony goes in this direction, that it's up to the State (school) to govern things.

Democracy, my daughter, unemployment is down there and that's all because of those who are in there and don't know how to govern things. [...] I believe that democracy, it's based on what we want, someone in front of us, that person who will speak for us, right? (Mother).

The above extracts reveal that the understanding / experience of democracy materializes based on the need to solve the daily problems that are presented in the social reality. The fragments of the mother's and the student's speeches are placed in the direction of the representative democracy present in the Brazilian political culture, in which the resolution of the problems are delegated to the elected representatives.

In another dimension, the idea of participation was associated with the possibility of promoting a school that, in addition to learning and citizenship, seeks to achieve goals:

I see an active participation, engaged in the cause, right? Because what we want is a school that has results, right? Not only in terms of learning, but also the question of citizenship, pass to students, right? (Teacher).

This discourse reinforces the current educational policy that defends the policy of results as an indicator of quality, that is, the involvement of school actors in the search for performance of students, teachers and management. There is no form of questioning about this school practice.

Although participation as a synonym of democracy is very present in the discourses of the subjects of the school, there is also in the view of the manager a certain resistance to the broader participation by students and parents in the decision of important issues for the school, pointing out the notion of reciprocity.

That resistance of participation, I think is being available. Be available to the public service. [...] A lot of difficulty, resistance. No one wants it because it's an extra responsibility, including suggestions that we receive that this work is rewarded, because it's a time that is made available to more (Management).

We emphasize the use of the word “gratification”, which indicates the notion of retribution for participation, as if parents expected to receive something in exchange for their presence at school, as if such presence were a favor, not a right! Resistance, therefore, is associated with the idea of parents and students as people disinterested in the school, which is not true, because there is often a lack of dialogue, understanding, approximation with these segments to know what they expect from the school, as well as, we add, a certain political formation in the school, with clarification of the importance of their presence for the education of their children.

The employee presents a more critical and realistic view, exposing the need for more participation in school as an important condition for improving the quality of education, including a more demanding attitude of parents in relation to the learning of their children.

The school was certainly going to change in several respects, especially with regard to the quality of teaching because if parents were participatory, they would demand from teachers. Then pressure on the teachers, there comes the quality, but the parents they have no interest in participating. In my view, the school should work harder on this issue and especially motivate parents of students to be participatory. That was going to make all the difference at school (Employee).

The presence of parents in school is fundamental when we want the accompaniment in the teaching-learning process and their participation in the decision-making processes in the school; however, in the discourses of managers and teachers has been a recurring complaint the low presence of parents in school. However, caution is needed to understand the reasons for this absence, because the policy of parental participation in school does not always move in the direction of parental interests. As Carvalho (2004), a scholar of the subject, warns, “in addition to the conditions and dispositions of parents to participate in the policy of encouraging their participation in school (particularly in the context of public schools), it presupposes

what it wants to build: cultural continuity and identity of purposes between families and schools” (p. 44).

About the possibility of experiencing democratic management in school, the student and parent segments (mother) said that they have heard about it, but do not know what it's. Therefore, we present how the segments express themselves on this issue.

Democratic management, I consider it very favorable, right? It was something that came to take away some of the political dominance from within the school unit. So, the community, those who are in this daily life, they can make their choice, those who will command, lead for a certain time the school unit (Manager).

I think that, despite the difficulties, we are moving towards this because when we take a position, it's precisely to improve, not only for the employees, but also for the students and even for the family. I think it's a whole set (Teacher).

Democratic management is still in its infancy. Not only here in our state, but across the country. Starting even from the question of directors, many directors do not know what democratic management is. I realize that you take that responsibility for gratification. In the old days the gratification was only two hundred reais, then no one wanted to be a director. When it was last year, it increased to one thousand two hundred. [...] But the issue of democratic management is very far from reality, very far from reality, very few directors know what it really is (Official).

In relation to the above statements, both the teacher's and the employee's discourses affirm that, despite the daily difficulties of the school, democratic management is moving forward. However, the employee draws attention to the lack of interest of teachers in wanting to be managers, which changed only due to the incentive of gratification.

A discourse that differs is that of the manager in which she alludes to the period in which the political domain within the school unit was very present, which refers to the political force in the history of traditional groups / families in charge of public life. It's worth remembering that, according to research by Macena & Prado (2014), through a questionnaire applied to the secretaries of education of Alagoas on the forms of provision for the position of school manager, it was found that 78% occurred by political indication/appointment, 15% by direct election, 1% by contest, 3% by other forms (not informed), and 1% did not respond. It's concluded from the data, that in the

municipalities of Alagoas the political indication is the predominant form in the choice of school managers, reinforcing in the 21th century the presence of the political domain in education.

Although we have the election for the composition of the Council, in practice, the process of choosing it's influenced by those who hold the power of persuasion. This may occur because, many times, young students and their own parents, because they have little schooling, reinforce traditional practices to the detriment of a broader education, which makes it possible to acquire tools to critically analyze the social reality in which they are inserted.

It is important to invest in the training of the members of the Council so that it has an effective action and so that it can act with technical knowledge and within an ethics that excels in transparency and fairness in its work of monitoring, supervision and accountability about the use of resources by the Public Power (TEIXEIRA, 2000).

Final Considerations

The objective of the research in the scope of the postdoctoral internship sought to apprehend the conceptions and practices of democracy / democratization that emerge in the daily life of the school, in order to understand the contribution of the local political culture in the construction of democratic practices in the space of the public school.

Understanding the Brazilian political culture necessarily implies going beyond the debate on democracy, encompassing with history the way the local elites managed to perpetuate themselves as such through the power relations implanted, and that has as marks the colonialism. This still reverberates in social practices, despite the advances of democracy, which also interferes in the educational sphere. This is reflected in everyday practices in society and at school, as well as permeates the collective imaginary in the way of thinking/developing public action.

The importance of systematic reflection on the democratic experience allows us to perceive / critically analyze the limits and scope of democracy in the school as it has been experienced, as well as helps to overcome the obstacles in daily school life that prevent the search for a social practice based on participation, collective debate and decision processes. We start from the assumption that democracy is a principle and

practice, and needs to be exercised and conquered daily in facing the problems of life in society.

The possible explanatory reasons for the type of democracy present as conceptions of the subjects and their expression in the context of Alagoas, based on the reality analyzed, can be enumerated as follows: 1) That we have no claim to affirm whether or not there is democratic management. That's not our goal; 2) Based on the literature studied and the analysis of collected data, we can infer that there is currently a demobilization, a lack of motivation to participate in school and even discredit in democratic management.

We live in a society impregnated with capitalist ideas and values in which the law of the market and material satisfaction prevail at all costs, an extremely consumerist society, in an unbridled search to meet individual interests to the detriment of the collective. This reality is also reflected in the dynamics of the school, where the subjects are overloaded, leading them to an exhaustive work, without the planning and study due to the improvement of its quality, isolated and often without committing to the collective and the school, restricting the materialization of practices that potentiate the effectiveness of democracy.

Rancière helps us to understand this aspect by calling democracy as dissent, democracy as equality, which we have not materialized in social practices. What we have characterized in the Brazilian and Alagoas school is an institutionalized democracy, which is representative, about which the author criticizes and which generates in society a conformism.

Still on the mechanisms of democracy in school, we corroborate with Botler (2013) when he states that democracy does not happen merely by decree, because it's in the Brazilian Constitution and in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional*). Democracy and participation happen in everyday relationships, in the construction of the objectives of the common good, as a dynamic culture, which is built in each collective, according to local singularities.

The discourse of democratic school management around which there is a consensus that this is the best way to organize the school / society (which differs from Rancière's notion of dissent) is lost, since its practice is distant from theory, as the data have revealed to us.

And finally, participation as a social practice also distances itself because it is always a protected participation, conditioned to something, not that participation in the full sense of the word as an achievement, as an expression of the subject's right to express himself and decide.

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