# THE DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF THE BRAZILIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AWARD

## A GESTÃO DEMOCRÁTICA DA ESCOLA PÚBLICA BRASILEIRA: UMA BREVE ANÁLISE DO PRÊMIO GESTÃO ESCOLAR

LA GESTIÓN DEMOCRÁTICA DE LA ESCUELA PÚBLICA BRASILEÑA: BREVE ANÁLISIS DEL PREMIO DE GESTIÓN ESCOLAR

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ABSTRACT: The Brazilian legislation that regulates education considers democratic school management a guaranteed right, and it is up to subnational institutions to implement it. This qualitative study makes a brief analysis of the winning schools of the Escola Gestão Award, organized by the National Council of Secretaries of Education, from 2013 to 2020, in the light of elements of the democratic management of Brazilian schools, discussed by authors who deal with of the theme. The results of the analyzes indicate that the actions taken by school managers and other actors in these schools resulted in an improvement in the quality of education, translated, for example, by the improvement in the index of development of basic education (IDEB) and in the reduction of school dropout, which in one of the schools was zero. It is considered, therefore, that democratic management and participatory management are fundamental elements for quality public education and seem to be present in the schools that won the School Management Award in Brazil, in the period studied.

**KEYWORDS**: Education. School. Management. Democracy.

RESUMO: A legislação brasileira que regulamenta a educação considera a gestão democrática escolar um direito garantido, cabendo às instituições subnacionais a sua operacionalização. Este estudo, de abordagem qualitativa, faz uma breve análise das escolas vencedoras do Prêmio Gestão Escolar, organizado pelo Conselho Nacional de Secretários de Educação, no período de 2013 a 2020, à luz de elementos da gestão democrática da escola brasileira, discutidos por autores que tratam do tema. Os resultados das análises indicam que as ações empreendidas pelos gestores escolares e os demais atores dessas escolas resultaram na melhoria da qualidade do ensino, traduzida, por exemplo, pela melhora no Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (IDEB) e na redução da evasão escolar, que em uma das escolas foi zero. Considera-se, portanto, que a gestão democrática e a gestão participativa são elementos fundamentais para um ensino público de qualidade e parecem estar presentes nas escolas vencedoras do Prêmio Gestão Escolar no Brasil, no período estudado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Escola. Gestão. Democracia.

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RESUMEN: La legislación brasileña que regula la educación considera la gestión escolar democrática como un derecho garantizado, y corresponde a las instituciones subnacionales implementarlo. Este estudio cualitativo hace un breve análisis de las escuelas ganadoras del Premio Escola Gestão, organizado por el Consejo Nacional de Secretarios de Educación, de 2013 a 2020, a la luz de elementos de la gestión democrática de las escuelas brasileñas, discutidos por autores que tratan con del tema. Los resultados de los análisis indican que las acciones realizadas por los administradores escolares y otros actores en estas escuelas resultaron en una mejora en la calidad de la educación, traducida, por ejemplo, por la mejora en el índice de desarrollo de la educación básica (IDEB) y en la reducción de la deserción escolar, que en una de las escuelas fue cero. Se considera, por tanto, que la gestión democrática y la gestión participativa son elementos fundamentales para la educación pública de calidad y parecen estar presentes en las escuelas que ganaron el Premio de Gestión Escolar en Brasil, en el período estudiado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación. Escuela. Gestión. Democracia.

#### Introduction

Historically in Brazil, it was only during the second republic, in 1934, that we had the first magna carta dedicating a chapter on education, that is, 434 years after the discovery of the country, with education not even being mentioned in the two previous constitutions: 1824 and 1891.

However, when we analyze democratic management as a constitutional principle of public education in Brazil, this desire comes from a long time ago. According to Rosa, Schane, and Filipak (2021), the concept of democratic management in Brazilian education emerged from historical struggles, such as the one that took place in 1932, with the launching of the Manifesto of the Pioneers of New Education, a document that pointed out the need for the democratization of education.

This manifesto, written and signed by 26 Brazilian intellectuals, is cited by many authors as an important milestone in the inaugural project of educational renovation in the country, which would only take place fifty-six years later.

Therefore, the unprecedented presence of democratic management as one of the pillars supporting Brazilian public education is one of the principles that was only guaranteed in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRAZIL, 1988), which, in its article 206, item VI, thus establishes it, leaving its regulation and operationalization to the subnational institutions.

This research, of qualitative approach and classified as exploratory and documentary, makes a brief analysis of the winning schools of the School Management Award, organized by the National Council of Secretaries of Education (CONSED in the Portuguese acronym), in the years 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2020, in the light of elements of the democratic management of the Brazilian school, discussed by authors who deal with the subject.

We begin by describing the concept of democratic school management, from the point of view of some authors in the field of education.

In a second moment, from some characteristics present in the model of democratic school management, we develop a brief comparative analysis with the winning projects of the School Management Award in the years 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2020, identifying this way what are the elements that led the projects to achieve the award as a model of innovative school management, achieving prominence at the national level.

The results of the analysis indicate that the actions undertaken by school managers and other school stakeholders resulted in improved quality of education, reflected, for example, in the improvement in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB in the Portuguese acronym) and in the reduction of the school dropout rate, which was zero in one of the award-winning schools. It is considered, therefore, that democratic management and participatory management are fundamental elements for quality public education and seem to be present in the winning schools of the School Management Award in Brazil in the period researched, which justifies the relevance of this study.

## **Democratic management at school**

In the process of struggle for the return to democracy in the 1980s, the theme of democratic management was part of the agenda of educators who claimed mechanisms of participation, such as: election of school leaders, establishment of school councils, collective preparation of regulations and pedagogical projects, among others (OLIVEIRA, 2019).

In Brazil, the magna carta of 1988 established in its article 206 the unprecedented presence of democratic management as one of the principles that should guide Brazilian education and, in subsection VI of this article, states that the democratic management of public education will be established in the form of the law (BRAZIL, 1988).

In this way, the legal framework that regulates educational management in the country, the Law of Directives and Bases for National Education (LDBEN), Law No. 9.394, of December 20, 1996, reaffirms the principles of education defined in the Federal Constitution of 1988, assigning in Article 3, item VIII, the "democratic management of public education, in the form of this Law and the legislation of the education systems" (BRAZIL, 1996, p. 1, our translation).

According to Oliveira (2019), this means that by guaranteeing the principle of democratic management in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRAZIL, 1988), it delegated to the education systems the prerogative of its construction and operationalization via complementary legislation.

This transfer of responsibility allowed the subnational educational units to build their own policies for the management of systems and school units. For example, we still find today in the states and municipalities of the country, units that have instituted instruments of democratization of education (election of principals, election of school colleges, institution of school councils, collective construction of the school's pedagogical project, among others), even those in which the decisions at the school level are only emanated from the education systems, or, even when there is a pedagogical project, this is only the result of the task required by the institutional bureaucracy (FERNANDES; SCAFF; OLIVEIRA, 2013 apud OLIVEIRA, 2019).

In their research work, Alves, Alves, and Viegas (2020), analyzed educational management in the Education Plans at the national, state, and municipal levels, and concluded that many of the local plans, whether state or municipal, are not aligned with the National Education Plan with regard to democratic school management.

For the authors, educational management is a much-discussed topic in Brazilian educational production, since it involves the organization, mobilization, and articulation of all material and human resources that are indispensable for the effective promotion of students' learning.

Regarding the practices of democratization of the school, Paro (2011), exemplifies the choice to fill the position of school principal, where we find three modalities: direct appointment by the executive branch, open competition and election by the school community.

However, according to the author, there is a growing modality that combines the application of basic skills assessment, through written tests to candidates, followed by elections.

About the election for school principal, the author states that, although it does not constitute any certainty in terms of the democratization of the school, since it is only one of the necessary measures, the election is the only one that has the virtue of contributing to the advancement of democratization in the school.

In Brazil we cannot complain about the lack of legislation that guarantees the model of democratic management in public schools. The National Education Plan, established by Law n°. 13.005/2014 (BRAZIL, 2014), organized in 20 goals, establishes in its article 2 the

guidelines and, among them, guideline VI: the promotion of the principle of democratic management of public education, and Article 9 defines that:

> The States, the Federal District and the Municipalities must approve specific laws for their school systems, regulating the democratic management of public education in their respective areas of operation, within two (2) years from the publication of this Law, adapting, where appropriate, local legislation already adopted for this purpose (BRAZIL, 2014, p. 1, our translation).

In this sense, Vieira and Vidal (2015) consider that democratic management is a guiding principle of the Brazilian public school and its implementation allows us to associate it with the emergence of a new model of school management, in which traces of a clientelist and patrimonial State and a managerialist conception still coexist.

Analyzing a sample of teachers and managers of public schools, with the aim of understanding the contours of public-school management in Brazil, the authors analyzed the Principal's and Teacher's Questionnaires, applied in the Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB) - Prova Brasil 2011.

In the study, the characteristics of school management were identified from the perspective of teachers and school principals, as well as elements on managerialist practices that oppose the proposed model of democratic management.

Exemplifying the case of the form of choice of school principals, it was found that almost half of Brazilian public schools have their managers chosen by appointment processes, which violates democratic principles, to the extent that these procedures do not involve clearly defined criteria, such as publicity and transparency (VIEIRA; VIDAL, 2015).

Regarding participatory management, in the same study, the authors found that the constitution of the School Council has the effective participation of teachers, employees, parents and students.

Speaking specifically about the work of the school principal, Paro (2012), understands that the same is in a hierarchical system that places it as the highest authority. However, according to the author, it is believed that most of the time he fulfills only bureaucratic tasks, because the administrative and financial demands of the school unit overload him in such a way that he cannot articulate with the pedagogical team, mischaracterizing the main function of the director: the learning of all students, which ends up being the least prioritized (PARO, 2012).

Regarding the participation of the members who are part of the school, together with the direction, Paro (2012), argues that the process only becomes democratic when everyone fights for the same cause, with no resistance between the school institution and the other participants, because, according to the author, to participate is to democratically dialogue and reflect on the needs for improvements for the school institution, which benefits everyone involved.

Gutierrez and Catani (2008 apud FERREIRA, 2008) approach the concepts of participation and school management, discussing their potentialities based on the experiences of three public state universities in São Paulo: São Paulo State University - UNESP, University of Campinas - UNICAMP and University of São Paulo - USP, mentioning the correlations between the forms of participation and the democratization of the school environment. They affirm that the management of these universities reveals a process of adoption of consultation instruments to the several segments and school subjects, but also present obstacles and conflicts occurred in the longing to live a self-management practice.

Ferreira (2008), emphasizes the importance of leadership built and legitimized in the participation and exercise of democracy, however, believes that in the face of the scenario of a new work context, which includes mainly the school environment, the training of professionals who apply for school management requires a solid human training as a fundamental competence for the exercise of the post.

For Luck (2009), democratic management can be defined as the process in which the conditions are created and the necessary guidelines are established so that the members of a community assume the commitments required for its effectiveness. This is because democracy presupposes much more than making decisions, that is, a democratic school is one in which its participants are collectively organized and engaged in promoting quality education for all.

In Luck's view (2009), as democratic management presupposes the mobilization and organization of people to act collectively in the promotion of educational goals, the work of school principals depends on their competence to lead, expressed in their ability to influence the actions of people (teachers, employees, students, parents, and others).

The integration of the school with the community and parents has been identified as a very important factor for its good functioning and the quality of its educational process. Principals whose schools were selected to receive the National Reference Award in School Management say that one of the most important strategies to raise the "toppled schools" has been the opening of the educational establishment to the community. In this way, they make the school available for community use and gain in return the recovery of the heritage and the partnership for its conservation. The school has become a happier and more friendly environment and the educational spirit has improved a lot, say the principals (LUCK, 2009).

## The School Management Award

The School Management Prize was established in July 1998 by the National Council of Secretaries of Education (CONSED in the Portuguese acronym), and aims to stimulate improvement in the management of Brazilian public schools at the basic level, recognizing good practices, encouraging the improvement of management processes and promoting actions that enable the exchange of experiences among managers, thus multiplying good strategies.

Coincidence or not, the institution of this award occurred in the same decade in which the managerial public administration emerged in Brazil, implemented through the administrative reform that took place in the late 1990s, which aimed to provide greater efficiency and effectiveness to the public sector.

According to Torres and Kerbauy (2019), the managerial reform of the Brazilian state, which originated in the State Reform Master Plan (PDRE in Portuguese) in 1995, focused on organizational effectiveness and the search for administrative efficiency. For the authors, Education, classified in the PDRE as a State sector of the non-exclusive service type, had managerial administration as its planned form of management.

In 2020, the School Management Award had a special edition due to the pandemic scenario experienced that year, when the theme was chosen: "How are schools facing the challenge of social withdrawal to maintain the bond between school players?".

According to the organizers, the goal of this edition was to generate visibility to the creative and innovative ways in which schools have dealt with social withdrawal, giving importance and valuing school management, which created new formats for the continuity of their students' learning. There were 7,985 schools registered, a record according to the organizers, of which 5,984 completed the registration, fulfilling all validation requirements, thus moving on to the next stage of the process, which chooses the reference schools in each state, and then the choice at the national level (CONSED, 2020).

In the 2020 edition, the winner of the award was the High School Reference School "Profa Maria de Menezes Guimarães", in the town of Itacoruba - PE, whose project had as its central theme "Impact actions during the period of social isolation".

Through an action called "See you at home", the school's management team planned school activities for those who did not have access to the internet, either by printing and delivering them every two weeks to the students, or in partnership with a local radio station, producing the program "Fala, EREM", which broadcasted classes to all homes, even those with more difficult access. The project "I believe in you" was also organized, with biweekly evening

classes for 3rd grade students, with the intention of improving their learning levels, making possible the growth of the school's proficiency rates in the Pernambuco Educational Evaluation System (CONSED, 2020).

For the body that created the prize, there is the understanding that school management is made up of the school team, that is, everyone is part of the school management and should have co-responsibility both in decisions and in the implementation of actions, in monitoring and in the results achieved.

According to the description of the justification for the prize, on the website of the organizer - the National Council of Secretaries of Education - CONSED, it is believed that the School Management Prize is a way of materializing the strengthening and qualification of management teams of Brazilian public schools, as essential strategies for improving the quality of education, and has been a tool for mobilizing schools to focus the community's attention on the different processes involved in school management (CONSED, 2020).

In this sense, in the view of Carota (2016), who, in his master's dissertation made a study of the indicators of quality in school management used in the School Management Award in the year 2013, CONSED, as the organizing institution of the event, has acted to strengthen the democratic school management, because, with this stimulus of national repercussion, the number of Brazilian public schools that have joined the contest has increased considerably each year.

Since it was conceived and throughout its trajectory, approximately 34 thousand schools from all regions of the country have participated in the award, resulting in the national recognition of many school managers for their work and contributions, inspiring other Brazilian schools to improve the quality of public basic education.

Regarding the organization of the event, which since 2011 has become biannual, in addition to CONSED, are the organizers: the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI), the National Union of Municipal Education Officers (UNDIME), and sponsors are the Itaú Foundation for Education and Culture and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) - Representation in Brazil, in addition to other public and private institutions that offer some kind of support to the event.

## The selection process for the award winners

Initially, through various channels of communication, CONSED publicizes the call for the award and creates its own website for the receipt of applications, where all the information about it, as well as the Notice of Announcement and other documents, are made available.

With this, the administrators are invited to involve the community in an evaluation of the school's reality, using the award's Orientation Manual as a starting point. The manager, assisted by representatives of the school community, makes a diagnosis of the teaching conditions offered by the school - considering five different dimensions of school management - and draws up an action plan aimed at improving the aspects diagnosed.

Once enrolled in the award process, the manager and the community undertake to review processes, actions, and teaching strategies or seek improvements in infrastructure. This dynamic is considered by the organizer of the event, CONSED, as a win-win for everyone, since the school community can continue to use the same tool over time to analyze the evolution of management.

In all stages, five dimensions are evaluated: pedagogical management, participatory management, service and resource management, results management, and people management. For evaluation, the Award is based on a study done in the context of the now-defunct National Network of Reference in School Management (RENAGESTE), conducted with the aim of specifying the main guiding aspects of school management.

For Carota (2016), when considering the five dimensions of school management, the representatives of the school community outline an action plan that offers gains to all, because it enables the community to monitor the work, actions, and projects that are carried out by the management throughout the work, which leads to the engagement of all involved.

Each federation unit, via the State Education Secretariat, selects its state/district highlight. Subsequently, a commission made up of representatives of the award's partners chooses six national finalists, who compete for the Brazil Reference title.

## Methodology

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This is a qualitative approach study, because it describes the complexity of the problem and the interaction between variables that, according to Dihel and Tatim (2004), comprises dynamic processes of the particularities and behaviors of individuals. The present research can be classified as exploratory in terms of its objectives, which, according to Andrade (2009), provides more information on the subject and the possibility of new approaches for future

research. As for the data collection procedures, it is classified as documental, because it uses material that has not received any analytical treatment, i.e., secondary sources.

To collect information, due to the protocols of social distancing determined by the pandemic scenario caused by COVID-19, the researchers resorted to various searches on the World Wide Web - internet - seeking information on the sites of the National Council of Secretaries of Education (CONSED), the School Management Award, the Ministry of Education, the State Departments of Education of several states, among others, between the years 2013 and 2020.

#### Results

In Table 1, we have prepared a descriptive summary of the winning schools in the national reference category, in the last four years in which the event took place, including the year in which we started the Pandemic scenario caused by COVID-1.

It can be observed in the description that the themes of the three winning projects in the years prior to the Pandemic go through several elements that can be classified according to the democratic school management model, such as: engagement, democracy, participation, quality, innovation, and that, together, have a positive impact on the results of the school unit, reflecting, as can be seen in the table, in better quality of teaching and school dropout.

**Table 1** – School Management Award Winners

YEAR	SCHOOL	PLACE	PRINCIPAL	PROJECT'S SUMMARY
2013	EE Luiza Nunes Bezerra	Juara - MT	Sibeli Lopes	Zero school dropouts.
2015	CE Maria das Graças Menezes Moura	Itabi - SE	Maria das Graças Albuquerque	Improvement in the IDEB index, community participation in projects and
				initiatives and of teachers and students in decisions, innovative attitudes of teachers.
2017	EEF Mont'Alvern	Ituporanga - SC	Viviane Rosa Bennert	Engagement of all, participation of parents and guardians in the activities and decisions of school affairs, participatory educational

				management, institutional evaluation by the school community.
2020	Escola de Referência em Ensino Médio - EREM "Prof <sup>a</sup> Maria de Menezes Guimarães"	Itacoruba - PE	Tatiany Leal Santos	Impact actions during the period of social isolation. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the Escola de Referência em Ensino Médio Professora Maria de Menezes Guimarães, added all possible efforts to persist in its journey. After the suspension of face-to-face classes, it was necessary to rethink actions, trace routes, and retrace paths. The basis of these actions was observation, and its fuel was dialog. Through the action "See you at home", the management team printed and delivered fortnightly school activities to those who did not have access to the Internet. to those who did not have access to the Internet. In partnership with a radio station, the program "Fala, EREM" was produced, which broadcasted classes to all homes, even to those with more difficult access.

Source: Prepared by the authors

Therefore, analyzing the central themes of the winning projects, except for the one in 2020, which was related to the Pandemic, in previous years the presence of elements of democratic management in the winning schools is evident. It is observed, for example, that the participation of parents, guardians, and the community in the projects was essential for them to succeed in their purposes.

Carota (2016), in discussing the five dimensions of school management, states that community participation, an element found in the projects of the winning schools, is of fundamental importance in monitoring the work and actions taken by the school management, because it is a democratic management style that leads to the engagement of all involved, whether students, parents, guardians, teachers, technicians, and the community.

Figure 1 below illustrates, using the word cloud technique, the elements of democratic school management that appeared most often in the winning projects of the School Management Prize in 2013, 2015, and 2017.

Several words related to the democratic management style stand out, such as: participation, decisions, community, teachers, students, parents, improvement, among others.

Figure 1 – Word Cloud: Spotlight on the themes of winning projects<sup>3</sup>



Source: Prepared by the authors

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Translator's note: The words that stand out the most in this word cloud are: community, decisions, teachers,

#### Final remarks

It is clear that Brazilian legislation, since the magna carta of 1988 (BRAZIL, 1988), unfolding in specific legislations that regulate national education, privileges the democratization of school management, so much so that, as described at the beginning of this work, it is a guaranteed right.

However, it is up to the subnational institutions to make it operational, which may not occur in practice, according to the view of several authors and researchers in the field of education.

This research, albeit briefly, sought to investigate the winning themes of the School Management Award in the years 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2020, aiming to identify whether there would be elements of democratic school management, discussed by the authors referenced here, in schools that have achieved national recognition as an innovative school management model.

The results of the analysis indicate that the actions undertaken by school managers and other actors in these schools resulted in improved quality of education, translated, for example, in the improvement of IDEB indexes and in the reduction of school dropouts, which in one of the prize-winning schools was zero.

We conclude, therefore, that democratic management and participatory management are fundamental elements for quality public education and seem to be present in the winning schools of the School Management Prize in Brazil in the years researched: 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2020, which justifies the relevance of this study.

This study can be considered relevant to the extent that, even though we cut an analysis to four editions of the event, we identified important aspects and actions of school managers of the winning institutions of the award, which leads us to evidence or consider that democratic management and participatory management are present in these schools, being fundamental elements for a democratic and quality public education and the effective exercise of citizenship.

It is recommended that future research on this topic deepen the analysis of the winning projects, with the aim of identifying more precisely which indicators were used in the measurement that led those projects to achieve recognition as a national benchmark in School Management, and even if these indicators have an important relationship with the democratic management of Brazilian public schools.

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