

**HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS FOR A DEMOCRATIC  
SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN BRAZIL<sup>1</sup>**

***REFLEXÕES HISTÓRICAS E SOCIOLÓGICAS PARA UMA GESTÃO DEMOCRÁTICA  
DA ESCOLA NO BRASIL***

***REFLEXIONES HISTÓRICAS Y SOCIOLÓGICAS PARA UNA GESTIÓN ESCOLAR  
DEMOCRÁTICA EN BRASIL***

Wilson da Silva SANTOS<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This paper analyzes school management as a process that reveals to be a social phenomenon integrated in the superstructure of the State, in its dimension of civil society (the spatial organization and the cultural character of the school, etc.). The actions that take place in this dimension cause school management and organization to be conceived in their contradictions, complexities and heterogeneity. This article takes place in a sociological and historical perspective and has as theoretical-methodological framework the conceptual formulations, above all, by Florestan Fernandes, Antonio Gramsci and Vitor Henrique Paro. This theoretical-methodological framework assists us in a more refined understanding of collegiate and autonomous management as a dialectical process, which may or may not be directed to the interests of the subordinate classes. Thus, this investigation addresses the theme of school management as an educational phenomenon that has its peculiarities due to its historical moment of continuity and discontinuity.

**KEYWORDS:** State. Democracy. School management. Autonomy.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo analisa a gestão escolar como um processo que revela ser um fenômeno social integrado na superestrutura do Estado, em sua dimensão da sociedade civil (a organização espacial e o caráter cultural da escola etc.). As ações que acontecem nessa dimensão fazem com que a gestão e a organização escolares sejam concebidas em suas contradições, complexidades e heterogeneidade. Este artigo dá-se numa perspectiva sociológica e histórica e tem como referencial teórico-metodológico as formulações conceituais, sobretudo, de Florestan Fernandes, de Antonio Gramsci e de Vitor Henrique Paro. Este referencial teórico-metodológico nos auxilia na compreensão mais refinada sobre a gestão colegiada e autônoma como processo dialético, que pode estar voltada, ou não, aos interesses das classes subalternas. Dessa forma, esta investigação aborda o tema da gestão escolar como um fenômeno educativo que tem as suas peculiaridades em razão de seu momento histórico de continuidade e descontinuidade.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Estado. Democracia. Gestão escolar. Autonomia.

<sup>1</sup> This article is the result of studies carried out in the Master's in Education, at UFPB, and in the Doctorate in Education, at UNICAMP.

<sup>2</sup> Bahia State University (UNEB), Catité – BA – Brazil. Adjunct Professor in the Department of Human Sciences. PhD in Philosophy and History of Education (UNICAMP). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2310-1077>. E-mail: [wisanvc@yahoo.com.br](mailto:wisanvc@yahoo.com.br)

**RESUMEN:** *Este artículo analiza la gestión escolar como un proceso que revela ser un fenómeno social integrado en la superestructura del Estado, en su dimensión de sociedad civil (la organización espacial y el carácter cultural de la escuela, etc.). Las acciones que tienen lugar en esta dimensión hacen que la gestión y la organización escolar se conciben en sus contradicciones, complejidades y heterogeneidad. Este artículo se desarrolla en una perspectiva sociológica e histórica y tiene como marco teórico-metodológico las formulaciones conceptuales, sobre todo, de Florestan Fernandes, Antonio Gramsci y Vitor Henrique Paro. Este marco teórico-metodológico nos ayuda a una comprensión más refinada de la gestión colegiada y autónoma como un proceso dialéctico, que puede o no estar dirigido a los intereses de las clases subordinadas. Por lo tanto, esta investigación aborda el tema de la gestión escolar como un fenómeno educativo que tiene sus peculiaridades debido a su momento histórico de continuidad y discontinuidad.*

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** *Estado. Democracia. Gestión escolar. Autonomía.*

The Brazilian State, as analyzed by Florestan Fernandes (1987), in his book “*Revolução burguesa no Brasil*” (The Bourgeois Revolution in Brazil), presents us with the peculiarities of a movement that began in 1964, with its ending in resolute in the 1970s. During this period, the so-called revolution, by Florestan, coerced the dominant classes over and eluded the subordinate and working classes. The bourgeoisie, at that time, proceeded with a conservative base in the question of modernization of internal capital and of the State itself, preferring to act with autocratic means of domination.

In view of this, Florestan stresses that the main characteristic of the 'bourgeois revolution' in Brazil was the fact that the Brazilian bourgeoisie proposed an alliance with the old-fashioned ruling classes and the military apparatus, making impossible, in a way, the most frequent commitment to the subordinate classes; if implemented, it would lead to the expansion of civil, social and political rights.

In short, the analysis made by Fernandes was developed in the 1960s and 1970s, highlighting three essential and problematic points intertwined in their historical and sociological events. In the first point, Florestan breaks down the class struggles that resulted in the coup of 64, which he calls 'preventive counterrevolution', delivered by the dominant class, reconciled and converged around a peculiar interest, which was to stop the political and ideological mobilizing advance of social and popular movements, which began in the early 1960s. In the second, in his analysis, he defines the political-institutional structure of the regime that emerged from the coup of 64, conceptualizing such a regime of 'bourgeois autocracy'. The bourgeoisie created a structure in such a way that it did not manage to build a consensus with

the subordinate classes, thereby restricting its action along the lines of the coercive state against the popular segments.

Finally, in the third point of analysis, Florestan was already emerging and envisioning the contours of the opening process that took place in the mid-1970s. In fact, it was a project presented by the military regime to solve the crisis that began at that time in the economic and political contexts. The consubstantiation of this project would denote only that “the bourgeois autocracy leads to a typical restricted democracy, which could be designated as a cooptation democracy” (FERNANDES, 1987, p. 358-359, our translation). In Gramscian postulates, this could be called ‘transformism’. That is, the dominant segments tried to remain and to retain the power by incorporating agreements with part of the opposition considered moderate, however, remaining with its eminently autocratic character. What Florestan expresses in this analytical erection is the phase of ‘a reform arranged from above’, with a transition typical of a ‘conversational transaction’, forming an institutional apparatus that embodied ‘the umpteenth manifestation of the bourgeois autocracy, as the last and surprising refuge dictatorship’.

Based on Faoro (1976), in his classic work “*Os donos do poder*” (The owners of power), even differentiating his sociological analysis, in his theoretical-methodological framework, from that of Florestan Fernandes, his investigation of the conception of the State is outlined in patrimonialist structure, converging with Florestan when investigating the way the patrimonial state directs power through the exclusion of some social segments, trying to perpetuate control in a systematic and permanent way against those below. According to Faoro (1976, p. 28-29, our translation),

Patrimonial, Patrimonial State, Patrimonial Monarchy derive from the concept of patrimonium, whose literal translation could lead to mistakes. There is, beside the Crown property, private property, recognized and secured by the princes. On property - of kings or private individuals - there is an over-ownership, identified with the territory, encompassing the command - barely separated from the domain - over things and people, over all things and all people. This over-ownership, identifying power with the thing on which it is exercised, leads to consider the inhabitant of the territory with the subject, over whom the prince's power hangs. In the Patrimonial State, there was latent the power of command, direction and appropriation over people and goods, without the subjects being able to bequeath, in case of inversion of property or demand for services, indemnities or compensations. Basically - in the pure forms of patrimonialism, forms actually built - the domain would be a concession from the prince, as the concession was all economic activity.

According to this idea, the Portuguese court, in its form of patrimonial monarchy, was in charge of ingesting in the conception of the Brazilian State the prominence that public administrations will not be configured as relations based on the construction of political praxis

and popular participation in the decision-making processes, but they will intertwine governors and governed in the networks of *compadrio* and physiologism. Power is exercised as a generator of bargaining and private services.

The concept of Florestan Fernandes (1987) 'preventive counter-revolution' and even the analysis established by Faoro (1976), on the control that the patrimonial State has against those 'below', find resonance to the aforementioned element 'preventive action' of the segments dominant categories categorized by Weffort (1978, p. 15, our translation), when he maintains that

due to the classic anticipation of 'elites', the popular masses have remained and still remain today the phantom partner in the political game. They were the great force that never came to participate directly in the great clashes, always resolved among the political cadres of the dominant groups, some of which claimed for themselves the legitimate interpretation of popular interests.

The non-participation of the popular masses in the political decisions of public affairs cannot be understood as a lethargic and absentee state that they present. This is because the legitimizing forces of the organic intellectuals of the political direction of the dominant groups have stiffened and still stiffen barriers, even institutional, for the acquisition of privileges in the decision-making process.

Political relations, in Brazil, inevitably settle, broadly, in their institutional forms of representation. This happened not only in the complex and dense structures belonging to either political society or civil society, but in instances, such as the public school, where this political-pedagogical space, in a recent way, is managed by leaders chosen through suffrage.

However, the choice of the leader through suffrage presents obstacles to political participation by the popular classes, which turns the political relationship into a mere relationship between individuals, building a hierarchy in the public entities whose leader monopolizes government power and personalizes him as the holder of absolute power, that is, decisions are submitted and taken in a structure of political relations in which the bifurcation between thinking and executing becomes tacit.

The penetration of the structures of representative democracy in Brazil, still present today, has kept the participation of the subaltern classes quite limited, being feasible by the exclusion of social and popular movements. The strong centralization of the Executive Power and the corporatist performance of several private groups become a setback for the materialization of substantive democracy, perpetuating in a way a patrimonialist State.

This representative democracy is a decision and deliberation process based on the hegemonic model of liberal patrimonial democracy. It is a formal democracy based on the appropriation of the public good by political and economic elites. Its procedures lead to two critical results: the first is the growing distance between representatives and those represented; and the second is a fictitious scenario of political insertion made, at the same time, of social and civil exclusion. Equidistant from the hegemony of the representative patrimonial democratic system, participatory democracy contains a dynamic that is managed by subordinate groups in confrontation with political, social and civil exclusion, and enabling the encompassing of new social inclusion contracts and a 'higher intensity' democracy.

Certainly, participatory democracy is peremptorily the systemic mechanism that competes directly in their decisions and control. This democratic process has the assertion of the probability of the increase of different actors and social groups at different times and decision-making processes. The prevalence of this innovative movement is the acceptance of the recognition of cultural plurality and the singularities of different social identities, which demonstrates the need to (re)conceptualize democratic expressions and practices that overcome the binding power of formal and representative democracy.

The compatibility between representative and participatory democracy can happen in an integral way and not overlapping one another, assuming, in this overlapping sense, participatory democracy as a detail model, as a prosaic accessory with its supplementary details, without the ability to enhance and organize the civil society as a protagonist of political, economic and historical-social praxis. The participatory procedure of discussion and deliberation of public affairs allows to broaden its scope of action at local and regional levels, placing in the agenda, besides the decision-making prerogative, also the motto of cultural diversity and plurality and the urgency of social-political inclusion.

Evidently, the democratic form, which agrees between participation and representation, promotes the expansion of the discussion on participatory democracy and democratic deliberation. Deliberative democracy is the replacement of the dichotomy between participatory democracy, intended as direct democracy, and representative democracy, being a trend that integrates the value and the procedure of social, democratic and popular practices to a broader state in its role of safeguarding the '*res publica*' and the collective interests of the social dynamic.

When it comes to democratizing the possible spaces of society, it is a matter of placing on the agenda the crucial point, which is civil society. What is assumed as a premise is not only the valorization of civil society itself, but that there is a projection of it as a pivot that enables

its politicization and that frees it from the networks that place it as an arena of pressure of particular interests; politicizing it has the purpose of establishing an organic relationship with the State<sup>3</sup>, in which the totalizing and universal relevance of civil society is of general interest.

With the situation of the representative political system, seen as a protagonist of the absorption of negative forces, an exaltation of civil society is created as an instance whose values of spontaneous associations, non-governmental organizations and communitarianism are the collaborators and pulverizers of a new societal order. The vivification of civil society, within this logic, narrows a conception that distances civil society from the State, causing a certain dichotomy between State and civil society, which makes structural and dialectical relations impossible, and, according to Gramsci, does not have a relationship of unity and distinction.

The understanding of the composition of civil society through private, voluntary and lower associative initiatives, with its fragmenting and entrepreneurial character, makes up a dimension that generates a process of depoliticization without limits in civil society and submitting to the conditions of current hegemony. As soon as, in a structuring perspective, civil society disengages itself as a potential and real sphere where the creation and development of subjectivities are found that cause cathartic action to emerge “to indicate the passage of the merely economic (or egoistic-passionate) moment to the ethical-political moment, that is, the superior elaboration of the structure in superstructure in the conscience of men” (GRAMSCI, 1999, p. 314, our translation). This organization and this elevation to the ethical-political moment can only come from the subjects considered as protagonists of the historical-social activity, which signals the importance of the organicity of the subordinate class, whose subjects of action and thought, when leaving themselves and aiming leadership and domination, propose the universalization of ethical and political values of a higher society.

Civil society, without a dialectical and organic overlap with the State, is not a space for confrontation and struggle between classes in the attempt for hegemony, there is no political relationship that leads to the construction of consent and long-term projects. Separated from the State, civil society remains in chains that reduce it to a terrain that does not generate an increase in collective values or the enhancement of subjectivity as a way of elaborating proposals or

---

<sup>3</sup> When mentioning the relationship between civil society and the State, the term State, in this relationship, is used to refer to the instance 'political society', characterized by its institutions, such as politics, legal power, government and its bureaucratic apparatus, etc. For Gramsci, the support of the identity/distinction between civil society and political society starts from the understanding that these two fields are different and 'autonomous', but inseparable in their practice. It must be ratified that civil society and political society are in the superstructure. The 'organic interrelationship' between the infrastructure (productive force and production relationships) and the superstructure forms the 'historic block'.



counterproposals that can stop the struggle for ideological, cultural, political and, also, economic hegemony; especially the economic sphere, due to the fact that civil society is also the manifestation of a certain mode of production that engenders class relations.

For Gramsci, historical-social subjects always aspire to the hegemony of direction and domination. And this hegemony cannot happen outside of civil society and, even without the State, there will be no civil society. In Nogueira's view (2005, p. 103),

no civil society is immediately political. Since the world of organizations, of particularities, of defense, often selfish and passionate about partial interests, its political dimension needs to be constructed. The shock, the competition and the struggles between the different groups, projects and interests act as the decisive motives for its politicization. It is in this way - that is, as a political space - that civil society is linked to the democratic public space and can function as the basis of a hegemonic dispute and an effectively emancipatory, popular and democratic opposition to the domination strategies referenced by big capital.

The knowledge that one should have of the State in the broad sense is to try to envision a relationship between superstructure (civil society + political society) and structure, as a dialectical unity and distinction that allows us to build the societal scope whose political praxis is final for the reform of State reform. This suggests that this relationship refers to the issue of participation and democracy within the reform of the State and the provision and expansion of public space, that is, a State that assumes the ethical-political role of reinvigorating and organizing civil society.

This analysis, addressed until now, conditions us to think of the school institution as a promoter of dialectical elements, an instance that tries to mediate, concomitantly, conflicts and tensions of the most diverse interests and an organization of transformation and innovation, as it signals the possibility to exercise internal communications that explain these conflicts and tensions that are manifested lately in the school routine, both in the speeches and in the attitudes of the subjects who attend school.

Therefore, collegiate, autonomous and participatory management can be a possibility of implementing a pedagogy that provides situations for a new dynamic that provides opportunities for the emerging forces of the popular strata. A progressive practice of education is solidified by the preponderance of collective desires and interests, seeking to concretize the democratization process of the highest intensity in school routine. However, the possible corporatist action of collective interests can damage the school unit's autonomous and democratic content, by highlighting the confrontations and pressures that certain groups may dominate for clientelistic, physiological and corporatist interests.

Collegiate management can make pedagogical practice viable as a strategy for the needs of the popular strata. For this to happen, it is essential that it allows the whole school community to participate in the consultative, normative and deliberative spheres. By intermediating the fundamental decisions of the school community, collegiate/participatory management constitutes itself as a determined and determinative dialectic structure of educational praxis (theory and practice).

In its condition determined by an educational theory, it is clear that the collegiate management mechanism arises basically from a historical situation. For, as Florestan Fernandes shows us, Brazilian society, in the mid-1970s, is marked by contradictory events arising from the increase in autocratic power and the exploitation of monopoly capital, which was called after the 'democratic transition'. In this circumstance, a new scenario of social and political organization and mobilization appears, to the point of leading to changes in power relations in practically all areas, mainly in education. These transformations projected a new dimension of the concept of school management, whose practice took into account the participation in the decision-making process of the entire school community.

As a determining point of educational practice, collegiate management, by overcoming collective interests over the interests of private and corporate groups, becomes, within the school units, one of the crucial elements of the democratization of the school space. Thus, the school occupies a strategic place, since the coexistence of the various conceptions of the world with the dominant ideology within the school allows, due to its contradictions, the emergence of consciences and, consequently, the position of certain individuals or groups. Thus, it can be said that the school is one of the instances of civil society where the relations of production are reproduced to maintain an existing type of economic policy, but also where strategies appear that can confront the structures of that same policy. Thus, Florestan does not seem to have envisioned that the new scenario envisaged by the fall of the dictatorship could offer the popular and subordinate classes the configuration of a new tactic of political struggle, a tactic that, according to Gramsci (2000), should no longer be the 'war of movement', the frontal war, but the 'war of position', which would require the urgency of changing the notion of the so-called 'explosive' revolution by the 'procedural revolution', a correlation of strength that imposed the struggle for hegemony. Thus, the participation of the subordinate classes in the school collegiate, as the main agent of the democratic management of the public, popular and state schools, is a highlight given to the popular control of this institution, so important that it is located in civil society, and that is, therefore, a decisive sector for the movement war in the



consolidation of hegemony. In this panorama, Prais (1994, p. 68, our translation) ratifies saying that

in a gramscian analysis, it must be kept in mind that the ruling class, in order to fulfill its hegemonic function, must resort to civil society, and this was the concern of the new leaders. It means that, in order to reach consensus, it is not enough that the values of the dominant class materialize at the level of legislation; it is also necessary that they take place at the level of civil society, such as at the level of the school institution. This in turn implies a contradiction. For, if civil society is a space for the circulation of opposing ideologies, then the contradiction can be consciously exploited by the dominated class, in favor of their own interests, exerting a counter-hegemony through their organic intellectuals.

The elaboration of this counter-hegemony, on the part of the working class, more specifically by education professionals (teacher, pedagogical coordinator, etc.), parents of students and students, also occurs in the use of the legal principles on collegiate management and democratic. Because the legal device that implements collegiate management, with representation from all segments of the school and with the power to regulate and deliberate the educational process of the school institution, establishes itself as a substantial element for the working class to create, in the educational space, a counter-hegemony, making it a ruling class before becoming a ruler.

It is in the Gramscian perspective that the democratization of the educational process and school management provides the hegemonic struggle. According to Saviani (1980, p. 10-11, our translation), based on Gramsci, the

hegemonic struggle means precisely: the process of disarticulation-rearticulation, that is, it is a question of disarticulating those elements that are articulated around them, but are not inherent to the dominant ideology, and re-articulating them around popular interests, giving them the awareness, the cohesion and the coherence of an elaborated conception of the world, that is to say, of a philosophy. Considering that “every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical relationship”, education should be understood as an instrument of struggle. Struggle to establish a new hegemonic relationship that allows the constitution of a new historical block under the direction of the dominated fundamental class of capitalist society - the proletariat. But the proletariat cannot rise in hegemonic strength without raising the cultural level of the masses. Here, the fundamental importance of education is highlighted. The form of insertion of education in the hegemonic struggle configures two simultaneous and organically articulated moments: a negative moment, which consists of the criticism of the dominant conception (the bourgeois ideology), and a positive moment, which means working with common sense in order to extracting its valid core (common sense) and giving it an elaborate expression with a view to formulating a world view suited to popular interests.

This argument makes it possible to make democratic school management an important condition for the collective and purposeful construction of an educational project, aiming at the quality of teaching for the popular class. Teaching management, conceived as a participatory practice, is a primary tool for implementing the organization of the school's pedagogical work. In addition, this participatory management process can consolidate the power of the popular class and, therefore, engender social transformation under its direction. In this perspective, Gramsci (1978, p. 276, our translation) states categorically that “a social group can and should be a manager even before it gains government power. This is one of the main conditions for the conquest of power itself”.

When analyzing the collegiate management, supported by the ethical-political conception in Gramsci, it is healthy to say that its theoretical categories such as autonomy, freedom and collectivity end up defining the philosophical and political perspective of the construction of value, morals, culture and subjectivity of everyday school life. As we know, the analysis that Gramsci presents us does not lose the focus of Marxism: the class struggle and the notion of the collective subject that seeks its identity and autonomy. Furthermore, as it was considered that the transition from the economic-corporate state to the ethical-political state is the cathartic process for

to indicate the transition from the purely economic (or egoistic-passionate) moment to the ethical-political moment, that is, the superior elaboration of the structure in superstructure in the consciousness of men. The structure, of external strength that crushes man, assimilating him and making him passive, becomes a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethical-political form, originating new initiatives. The setting of the “cathartic” moment thus becomes, it seems to me, the starting point of the whole philosophy of praxis (GRAMSCI, 1999, p. 314-315, our translation).

In civil society, subjects develop not only their subjectivity and their individual capacities, but also expand their collective actions. This Gramscian support runs counter to liberal social logic, in which the interests of the individual are the focal point around which the State gravitates. In the dynamic, complex and inseparable formation of the social being and of the particular being, the vision of an autonomous subject is imbued with a concrete social coexistence, coexisting in conflicting and acquiescent aspects, based on the relationships between individuals who desire solidarity living, which is to say that active consensus and hegemony are built on differences and conflicts, between conscious and free social subjects. In this way, the freedom of the individual is guided and circumscribed according to the social being; Gramsci does not have the centrality of the interests of the individual as an independent and transcendental being of social reality. The individual is historically original when he gives

the maximum importance and life to sociality, without which he would be an 'idiot' (in the etymological sense, which in practice does not deviate from the ordinary and common sense) (GRAMSCI, 2000). Gramsci's interest is to allude that the individual and the collective subject are intertwined in a dialectical relationship in which freedom, inventive subjectivity and spontaneity are not disconnected from sociability, necessity and discipline.

In this sense, the possibility and the limit of the process of establishing autonomy do not derive from the normatization of the State instance, only. Its action is conceived with the recognition that the school is a space that generates values, beliefs, ideologies, attitudes, behaviors, which ends up being constituted as a producer and reproducer of cultures, of collective and individual identity. It is a socio-political and cultural field, whose process is built by different interests, which are negotiated, represented in the political and cultural dialogue of its collective members. Therefore, the school cultural organization, as a set of this content of values, beliefs, ideologies, (re)signifies the normative legal forms. That is why, in addition to the need for massive investment in infrastructure - human, material and financial resources -, autonomy presupposes a political project that requires a long duration to modify the cultural organization of the school and also the institutional structure of the public education system. This change occurs when the innovations that have emerged in the daily experience and practice of schools transform the existing reality into a more structural dynamic.

Anyway, any measure that legally regulates certain administrative procedures goes through a transition period that causes uncertainty and doubt in the staff of professionals, parents, students of the school unit, with the possibility of deregulating current administrative and bureaucratic rules and functions. Thus, it configures a state of tension that can trigger, or not, a change in the channeling paradigm of articulating principles that develop identity elements of those involved in the movement related to the modification of cultural organization and school structure. Finally, the construction of an autonomous and democratic management practice can only be seen in the face of an analytical incursion of the trajectory and configuration of school autonomy in its historical context.

In other words, an autonomy that cannot be separated from its political, social, cultural and economic significance. Therefore, the perspectives, possibilities and limits of school autonomy are based on cultural symbolic components of power, which are revealed in practices and representations of the school's cultural organization, representations that are supported by their founding values as conditions of school reality.

From this point of view, it can be emphasized that, in relation to the aspects that the school is responsible for deciding in its autonomous space, there is a consonance in which the

public school, to elaborate and carry out the pedagogical project, according to the common general precepts organized by the central administration of education and observing their specificities, must have greater competence in human resources and a massive expansion of financial resources. With the absence of these two fundamental criteria in the school organization, autonomy succumbs. It must be stressed that determining human and financial resources is an essential condition for achieving the pedagogical project. This project is understood as “becoming aware of the main problems of the school, of the possibilities of solution and definition of collective and personal responsibilities to eliminate or mitigate the detected flaws” (SPOSITO, 1990, p. 55, our translation).

Therefore, in the daily life of an autonomous school, decisions should not be reserved for the principal and/or teachers. To overcome this concentration of self-earned power, it is imperative to provide a democratic environment, in which participation in the decision-making process is active on the part of the entire school community. Students, parents and members of society, who are involved in the activities developed by the school, are people who take advantage of the services provided by the public-school institution. Hence, community involvement and participation in school issues is urgent and salutary, which ends up solidifying and maturing autonomy. Without sharing the decision-making power between the subjects involved in the school's daily life, participation faints, transforming councils and/or assemblies into a bureaucratic requirement.

Speaking of the participation of the population, teachers and employees, in the management of the public school, it implies saying which determinants condition its potentiality or impediment to its realization. According to Paro, the determinants internal to the school unit are: material, institutional and political-social (PARO, 2000).

The material conditioning is related to the objective working conditions for the achievement of educational goals in an efficient manner, which are presented and developed in the public school. Here, one can list a series of problems presented by the school, such as, for example, the deterioration of the school building, the substantial lack of equipment and pedagogical resources, overcrowded classrooms, teachers with a 60-hour workload, teaching in different schools, and debased teaching salary. Although the democratic relationship and the participation of subjects in school management do not happen as a direct result of a good working condition; likewise, the terrible material condition can corroborate the absence of this participation and, furthermore, of a good development of the teaching-learning process. This adversity, according to Paro, should not be taken as an “excuse to do nothing, but precisely to take it into account in the joint effort to seek collective goals that integrate, including,

overcoming it, or to pressure the State or the municipality towards this overcoming” (PARO, 2000, p. 22-44, our translation).

The institutional determinant is related to the way the public school is organized. This organization commonly provides a relationship that denies community participation in school management. It centralizes every decision in the principal instead of establishing a democratic relationship between the subjects of school autonomy. Still, it guarantees a hierarchical structure, of vertical relations, which precipitates a relation of subjection. The principal, in his role as the highest authority of the school, is seen as the holder of administrative knowledge who can solve all the problems immediately presented; problems that, many times, are not technical-administrative, but political, translated by the lack of resources and abandonment of the State.

As Paro (2000, p. 45-46, our translation) remembers,

in view of the current formal organization of the public school, we can see the hierarchical character of the distribution of authority, which aims to establish vertical relations, of command and submission, to the detriment of horizontal relations, favorable to democratic and participatory involvement. In addition, the principal appears, before the State, as the ultimate responsible for the functioning of the school, before users and school personnel, as the highest authority. Thus, having in fact to be accountable only to the State or municipality, he ends up, regardless of his will, serving as a representative in front of the school and the community. In turn, the existence of collective action mechanisms such as the Association of Parents and Teachers and the School Council, which should provide the population with more effective participation in school activities, does not seem to be satisfactorily serving this function, partly because its formal and bureaucratic character.

In this reality, it is necessary to think about the significant institutional reorganization that gives rise to and encourages greater participation in the school. Which is to say that the democratization permeated in the school can consolidate mechanisms that provoke externalization of conflicts, divergences and decisions.

Another imminent and determinant risk, which can compromise collective work in its autonomous and democratic character, is the conflict and pressure that similar groups impose on the school in the name of corporate and clientelist interests. These multiple group interests are the political-social influences that cut across social relationships within the school. In their school routine

people are guided by their immediate interests and these are conflicting and contradictory between the different groups working at the school. These contradictory interests are manifested in interpersonal relationships, in a school council meeting, in parent meetings, in the behavior in the face of the

teachers' strike, in the teaching-learning process in the classroom, in short, in the multiple relationships that take place on the school day. From the perspective of the participation of different groups in the management of the school, it seems that it is not a question of ignoring or minimizing the importance of these conflicts, but of taking into account their existence, as well as their causes and their implications in the search for the democratization of school management; as a necessary condition for the struggle for collective more far reaching objectives like the effective offer of good quality education for the population (PARO, 2000, p. 6-47, our translation).

Thus, these conflicts need to be overcome in the democratization process established at the school, making them more radical so that it can aim at the crucial objective of improving the quality of education. It is not a question of excluding the divergences that arise in the school space, but of identifying the consequences of the social interests of the groups that are present in the school for the promotion and consolidation of the democratization of the school unit, which can, therefore, favor the attainment teaching quality.

It is necessary to mention that the definition of competences and attributions for both teachers and technical-pedagogical employees, as well as for parents, students and the community, must be clear in an autonomous management. These attributions and competences, in many regiments and rules of school councils in public schools, are not made explicit, causing a huge disorder of a deliberative and consultative nature, which ends up giving rise to democratism or spontaneism.

Regarding the definition of competence and attribution, education professionals, who work directly in the school, whose management is participatory, must be attentive to work collectively within the internal decision-making process. For this to be achievable, the hours of these teachers must include moments for meeting and study. This dynamic of group work rescues the public school as a collective locus, overcoming a tight and compartmentalized activity that has long been perpetuated in the organizational culture of public education institutions.

Externally, many limitations are pointed out, in the implementation of school autonomy, as arising from the bureaucracy of the administrative agencies that are part of the education systems and that are protected by interest, often clientelistic, corporatist and political. The proportion that the activities of a pedagogical nature (such as planning and elaboration of the pedagogical project), as well as those of a financial and administrative nature, developed in centralized sectors of the structure of the education system, are transferred to schools, a considerable part of these bureaucratic sectors would be dissolved, or would function as



smaller and more professionalized and technically operational bureaucracy, being responsible, mainly, for qualification and pedagogical assistance functions for human resources in school establishments and for administrative assistance for the entire education system (ABREU, 1999, p. 124, our translation).

School autonomy, when it does not presuppose a management whose intent is to serve as mediation for the achievement of certain purposes, that is, the use of more adequate resources for the achievement of ends (PARO, 2000) may not consolidate into a positive result in the quality of the teaching-learning process. This is plausible when the necessary adjustment of resources and personnel to meet the purpose of the public school is not observed, or when it is wrongly analyzed. Paying attention to this adequacy is not to incur the wicked mistake of doing formal education with classrooms full of students, with 40 or 50 students, incompatible with the pedagogical work process; it is not missing the material and human resources consistent with the number of students.

This means that the role of the State must be increasingly established as a supplier of essential inputs for the development of the teaching-learning process; since school autonomy does not exempt the State from its attributions, mainly related to financing. The State and the central educational authorities, in their obligations to offer public, state, free and quality education, must adopt a structural policy that contemplates two basic axes:

first, definition of common basic guidelines, minimum and flexible, on what should be guaranteed for all, both in relation to curricula and their minimum contents, including capacities to be developed and knowledge to be acquired, and in relation to minimum standards of quality of teaching, referring to the operating conditions of schools, with the minimum variety and quantity of material and human inputs, with the common point of commitment to the quality of teaching. Second, definition of democratic management norms for public schools, guaranteeing the participation not only of teachers and employees, but also of students, parents and other segments of the community in the decision-making power and not allowing the problems generated by the participatory processes to harm the exercise the most important function of the school, that is, teaching (ABREU, 1999, p. 126, our translation).

This means that the basic theme of Brazilian education is that regular education, in order to be democratic and popular, must be totally free and universal, in favor of access for all, at all levels, public and lay, built and maintained by State, mandatory, taught in public and state schools, not bureaucratic, more critical, creative, in a word, autonomous. It is clear that the term autonomy has several meanings. Ratifying, this term cannot depart from its political and economic significance, that is, the ability to decide, direct, control, therefore, to be fully citizen, to assert rights and create duties (CHAUÍ, 1986).

An autonomous public school has a better chance of guaranteeing the quality of teaching, of drawing up its plans, its pedagogical project. Thus, this autonomy does not mean abandonment. It means the State to enable material and human resources so that the school can really make a democratic choice in the decisions of pedagogical practice.

## REFERENCES

- ABREU, M. **Organização da educação nacional na constituição e na LDB**. 2. ed. Unijuí, 1999.
- CHAUÍ, M. **Cultura e democracia**. São Paulo: Cortez, 1986.
- FAORO, R. **Os donos do poder: formação do patronato político brasileiro**. 8. ed. São Paulo: Globo, 1976.
- FERNANDES, F. **A Revolução burguesa no Brasil: ensaio de interpretação sociológica**. 3. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Guanabara, 1987.
- GRAMSCI, A. **Cadernos do cárcere**. Introdução ao estudo da filosofia. A filosofia de Benedetto Croce. Trad. Carlos Nelson Coutinho e Luiz Sérgio Henriques. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1999. v. 1.
- GRAMSCI, A. **Obras escolhidas**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1978.
- GRAMSCI, A. **Cadernos do cárcere**. Maquiavel. Notas sobre o Estado e a política. Trad. Carlos Nelson Coutinho e Luiz Sérgio Henriques. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2000. v. 3.
- NOGUEIRA, M. A. **Um Estado para a sociedade civil: temas éticos e políticos da gestão democrática**. 2. ed. São Paulo: Cortez, 2005.
- PARO, V. H. **Escritos sobre educação**. São Paulo: Xamã, 2001.
- PARO, V. H. **Gestão democrática da escola pública**. 3. ed. São Paulo: Ática, 2000.
- PRAIS, M. L. M. **Administração colegiada na escola pública**. 3. ed. Campinas: Papirus, 1994.
- SAVIANI, D. **Educação: do senso comum à consciência filosófica**. São Paulo: Cortez; Autores Associados, 1980.
- SPOSITO, M. P. Educação, gestão democrática e participação popular. **Educação e Realidade**, Porto Alegre, v. 15, n. 1, jan./jun. 1990.
- WEFFORT, F. **Qual democracia?** São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1978.

## **How to reference this article**

SANTOS, W. S. Historical and sociological reflections for a democratic school management in Brazil. **Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional**, Araraquara, v. 24, n. 3, p. 1333-1349, Sep./Dec. 2020. e-ISSN:1519-9029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v24i3.13550>

**Submitted:** 08/04/2020

**Required revisions:** 03/06/2020

**Approved:** 20/07/2020

**Published:** 01/09/2020