

ANÍSIO TEIXEIRA: EDUCATION AS A BASIS FOR DEMOCRACY

ANÍSIO TEIXEIRA: A EDUCAÇÃO COMO BASE PARA A DEMOCRACIA

ANÍSIO TEIXEIRA: LA EDUCACIÓN COMO BASE DE LA DEMOCRACIA



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ABSTRACT: This article aims to examine how Anísio Teixeira presents education as the basis for democracy. The research is bibliographic in nature and will analyze the first part of the book *Education is a Right*. Its relevance is related to the school's responsibility to prepare its students for citizenship. The results demonstrate that democratic societies will need to educate their citizens for the new emerging social context, characterized by pluralism, liberalism, and decentralization. In Brazil, education was reaffirmed as a right of all and a duty of the State in the 1946 Constitution; however, the system proposed there presented a dual, undemocratic model. The author proposes an integrated national education system in which the Union, states, and municipalities acquire joint responsibility for funding. This system should be implemented through the establishment of local councils that would administer education in a way that guarantees its democratic character.

KEYWORDS: Education. Democracy. Society.

RESUMO: *Este artigo tem como objetivo verificar como Anísio Teixeira apresenta a educação como base para a democracia. A pesquisa é de caráter bibliográfico e analisará a primeira parte do livro Educação é um Direito. Sua relevância está relacionada à atribuição que a escola tem de preparar seus educandos para a cidadania. Os resultados demonstram que as sociedades democráticas precisarão educar seus cidadãos para o novo contexto social emergente, de caráter plural, liberal e descentralizada. No Brasil, a educação foi reafirmada como direito de todos e de dever do Estado na Constituição de 1946, contudo, o sistema ali proposto apresentava um modelo de caráter dual, não democrático. O Autor propõe um sistema nacional integrado de ensino, no qual União, estados e municípios adquirem responsabilidade solidária em relação aos fundos. Este sistema deveria ser efetivado com o estabelecimento de conselhos locais que administrariam a educação de forma a garantir seu caráter democrático.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Democracia. Sociedade.

RESUMEN: *Este artículo busca examinar cómo Anísio Teixeira presenta la educación como base de la democracia. La investigación, de carácter bibliográfico, analizará la primera parte del libro La educación es un derecho. Su relevancia se relaciona con la responsabilidad de la escuela de preparar a sus estudiantes para la ciudadanía. Los resultados demuestran que las sociedades democráticas necesitarán educar a sus ciudadanos para el nuevo contexto social emergente, caracterizado por el pluralismo, el liberalismo y la descentralización. En Brasil, la educación fue reafirmada como un derecho de todos y un deber del Estado en la Constitución de 1946; sin embargo, el sistema propuesto allí presentaba un modelo dual y antidemocrático. El autor propone un sistema educativo nacional integrado en el que la Unión, los estados y los municipios adquieran la responsabilidad conjunta de su financiación. Este sistema debería implementarse mediante el establecimiento de consejos locales que administren la educación de manera que se garantice su carácter democrático.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación. Democracia. Sociedad.

INTRODUCTION

Brazilian society has established a consensus that schools should educate citizens for democracy. This consensus is enshrined in the current Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, in Article 205: “education, a right of all and a duty of the State and the family, shall be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aiming at the full development of the person, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and their qualification for work” (Brazil, 1988). As the environment inherently dedicated to education, the school thus assumes a political and social function: to form individuals capable of actively participating in public life, respecting fundamental rights, and fostering plural coexistence—values that underpin democracy.

In this context, this article aims to examine how Anísio Teixeira presented education as a foundation for the consolidation of democracy in modern societies. This is a bibliographic study that analyzes the first part of his book *Education Is a Right*. The findings indicate that, in the author’s view, emerging democratic societies must educate their citizens for a new, large-scale social order characterized by plurality, liberalism, and decentralization. The author proposes an integrated national education system in which the federal government, states, and municipalities share joint responsibility for funding. This system should be implemented through the establishment of local councils responsible for autonomously managing education, thereby ensuring its democratic character. The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that Brazil is still in the process of consolidating its democracy and continues to face the challenge of guaranteeing the right to quality education for all, both as a means of personal emancipation and as a national project.

Anísio Teixeira was born in the city of Caetité, in the interior of the state of Bahia, in 1900. Coming from a landowning family, he received his primary education from a private tutor and an aunt. At the age of 14, he was sent to Salvador to study at Colégio Antônio Vieira, a Jesuit school. Influenced by priest-teachers, he was encouraged to pursue a religious vocation; however, his father envisioned a legal career for him. Paternal authority prevailed, and he was sent to Rio de Janeiro, where he graduated in Law.

After a trip to Europe, around the age of 25, Anísio decided to serve God in the world and was appointed by Governor Francisco Góes Calmon, following the 1924 election, as General Inspector of Education, becoming responsible for overseeing public instruction in the city of Salvador. It was through this position that he came into contact with public education. According to Nunes (2010), it was at this point that Teixeira encountered the public education

system and quickly identified its problems, which stemmed from public sector corruption, the disarticulation of educational services, and inadequate teacher preparation, as well as a shortage of both material and human resources—conditions that sharply contrasted with the elite education he had received.

The situation Teixeira found in public education was one of extreme precariousness. There was a shortage of teachers and resources. There was neither state support nor effective oversight. The politically driven allocation of educational positions placed schooling under the control of politicians. Although the Constitution of the State of Bahia of 1891 established that “Art. 148. Primary education shall be free, compulsory, and universal” (Bahia, 1891), public education in the state was limited to rudimentary literacy and a few schools located in the city of Salvador. The challenge was to overcome the privileging of private schools associated with deputies, senators, and local elites, and to recognize that the country could not be integrated into the group of modern democratic states without prioritizing public education.

Within the state apparatus and guided by Enlightenment ideals, Teixeira began to devote himself to pedagogical studies and, in 1927, undertook a seven-month trip to the United States, where he came into contact with the work of the American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952). A defining feature of Dewey’s thought was the centrality of democracy in both pedagogical theory and practice. He understood democracy not merely as a set of institutional rules by which society is organized, but as a way of life that should foster a culture of freedom across institutions, including the school.

This philosopher argued that educational processes are permeated by conflicts that stimulate individuals to activate their intelligence. Teixeira presents Dewey’s concept of education as follows: “we can now define, with Dewey, education as the process of reconstruction and reorganization of experience, through which we perceive its meaning more clearly and thereby become better able to direct the course of our future experiences” (Teixeira, 1971, p. 37).

Choosing Dewey—whom Teixeira would become the first to translate in Brazil—meant adopting an alternative to the old values inspired by Catholicism. It represented a commitment to integrating what had been divided: body and mind, feeling and thought, the sacred and the secular. It meant embracing scientific thought and affirming the belief that the roots and directions of social change in favor of democracy were grounded in childhood. (Nunes, 2010, p. 19)

In analyzing the possible dialogue between the ideas of Teixeira and Dewey, Henning (2022) highlights the social movements emerging at the time, which contributed to the construction of a new society in which education was assigned a decisive and structuring role:

Dewey and Teixeira operate within the context of industrialism, science, and technology, associated with elements such as new knowledge, urbanization, the modern world, and other factors related to a developmentalist spirit that breaks with the traditional model of the time. In this new scenario—particularly characteristic of the first half of the twentieth century—movements gain momentum, giving rise to a new mindset that generates demands, calls for change, requirements for education, and more flexible dispositions, among others. Education is thus called upon to shape this new landscape in a way that is more aligned with the emerging social, political, and cultural context. (Henning, 2022, pp. 3–4)

Through his role as General Inspector of Education in Salvador, his engagement with Dewey's work, and his postgraduate studies at American universities, Teixeira developed a lasting interest in democratic and educational issues. He later became Director General of Public Instruction in the Federal District—then located in Rio de Janeiro, the country's capital—where he implemented reforms and became one of the signatories of the 1932 Manifesto for New Education. As a leading figure in Brazilian education, Teixeira was an intellectual reformer who advocated for universal, secular, and democratic education.

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRACY

The emerging society that succeeded the feudal order was grounded in principles that shaped the Modern State, such as universal suffrage, fixed-term mandates, and the implicit accountability of elected officials to voters, who would not reelect those who failed to perform. These principles of political participation established the new democratic framework and assumed that every individual is capable of learning and contributing to the formation of society.

Democracy came to be understood as “the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive

struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter, 1961, p. 269). Avoiding tyranny, ensuring essential rights, general freedom, self-determination, moral autonomy, human development, and political equality were seen as desirable outcomes of the democratic system. Thus, "modern democracy is characterized, above all, by the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" (Dahl, 2001, p. 62).

The democratic system oriented toward freedom, which governs the constitutions of modern states through a representative model, is, according to Tocqueville (2010, p. 41), an unstoppable movement: "to seek to halt democracy would be like fighting against God Himself, and nations would have no choice but to adapt to the social condition imposed upon them by Providence." However, nations must remain vigilant to prevent this model from degenerating into a system in which society, after electing its representatives, withdraws entirely from public affairs. As Constant (1985) warns, "the danger of modern liberty lies in the possibility that, absorbed in the enjoyment of private independence and the pursuit of personal interests, we may too easily relinquish our right to participate in political power." Thus, even if education is organized by the State, it must be continuously monitored and overseen under the active scrutiny of society.

For the establishment of such a system, however, it was necessary to implement the principle of equality—one that extends beyond the political sphere and is consolidated as equity of opportunity. For Teixeira (1968), the failure of this liberal democratic project lay in not establishing education for all as its foundation.

Education was relegated to the individual sphere. As a result, only those with sufficient resources were able to access it. The consequence was that democratic society became oligarchic and aristocratic. The Modern State depended on a level of education that humanity had not yet experienced. Modern industrial society, with its unprecedented mode of production—combining maximum mechanical integration with minimal social integration, grounded in a scientific and impersonal system of labor aimed at maximizing financial outcomes—demanded a level of educational development not yet achieved. Education, according to Teixeira (1968, p. 20), is "the method for teaching how to think the new terms created by science." An analysis of the historical development of education in Brazil indicates that this level of advancement has never been achieved to the necessary extent.

The establishment of such a regime of intelligence and freedom is not something that can be brought about by an act of will, nor by mere governmental non-interference, but

rather the result of a system of education extended to all and of the highest effectiveness; of a system of free and courageous scientific research covering all fields of human interest; and of a system of information—through books, newspapers, radio, and television—rigorously free and guaranteed in its impartiality. (Teixeira, 1968, p. 23)

From a historical perspective, Teixeira (1968) emphasizes that it was only from the eighteenth century onward, with the emergence of properly democratic ideas, that education came to be regarded as a universal right and a fundamental demand. However, the recognition of a right does not guarantee its realization. Alongside democratic proposals emerged a form of individualism that assumed individuals could, on their own, achieve power, knowledge, and wealth. This conception of individualism and freedom restricted access to education to those who possessed the necessary means. According to Teixeira (1968, p. 30), the consequence of these ideas made “the nineteenth century a period of great material development and extreme human injustice.” The twentieth century, after being marked by major and devastating wars, revisited democratic principles and reconsidered that individual freedom depends on necessary social and external conditions. It became understood that a minimum level of equal opportunity is indispensable for the development of human potential.

Twentieth-century anthropology and psychology demystified the notion of the human being as a purely rational animal and a sovereign individual. The idea of intelligence as innate gave way to the understanding that only through education can the rational and democratic individual be formed. The individual required by this new model of society—capable of producing under different conditions and in ways distinct from the traditional—must have access to new modes of thinking and new capacities for action. For Teixeira (1968, p. 31), “the new type of democratic and scientific society could not consider its perpetuation possible without a very particular kind of school system. The old spontaneous processes of education were no longer viable.” Both totalitarian and democratic states would reach the conclusion that individuals must establish their political and social purposes, as these are not naturally given but must be artificially constructed—that is, educated. Thus, schooling became a matter of public interest.

It is in light of this that schooling becomes necessary to a degree never before envisaged in this process of voluntary human formation. For this very reason, it constitutes a public problem, a public interest, a right of every individual, and a duty of politically organized

society. It is not a matter of advantage or individual success, but of the very condition for the functioning of society according to the political model it adopts. (Teixeira, 1968, p. 31)

Democratic societies and their schools therefore face the demanding task of instilling in individuals complex, sophisticated, and possibly counterintuitive values. For Teixeira (1968, p. 32), these include “a spirit of objectivity, tolerance, inquiry, science, trust, and love for humanity, as well as the acceptance and use of the new—constantly brought forth by science—with a broad and generous human sense.” The complexity of plural society becomes evident through two main aspects. First, the recognition that there is no such thing as an individual human nature; rather, human nature is social. Consequently, individuals’ experiences within each society are shaped by varying degrees of adaptation and integration. Second, in modern large-scale society, relationships are no longer primarily established between individuals—known or unknown, friends or enemies—but, as Teixeira (1968, p. 33) states, “between individuals and organizations, across such diverse levels that the human person, the social person, becomes multiple, diverse, divided, making the former unity—the old ‘character,’ once a source of pride—much harder to sustain.” The question then arises: how can individuals be integrated in a society governed by contractual relations? New challenges emerge for social organization within the democratic order.

EDUCATION AND THE TASK OF FORMING THE NEW DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Education faces a substantial strategic challenge: how to prepare individuals to live in a large and impersonal society; how to equip them to manage and overcome conflicts; how to foster the development of individual potential while ensuring commitment to the collective good. Nations such as the United States have extended compulsory education to the age of eighteen. However, according to Teixeira (1968, p. 34), merely increasing the number of years is insufficient, “for the issue is not simply to extend it, but to reconstruct it, to give it new meaning, to discover methods and means of teaching what has not yet been taught—that is, to think with security, precision, and vision.” Accordingly, states must assign maximum priority to schools, recognizing their status as a matter of public interest, as they are responsible for the socialization of individuals within an increasingly complex and diverse social body.

Schools should therefore be organized as local entities, administered by lay and community-based councils, operating in close proximity to the institutions they oversee and endowed with the highest possible degree of autonomy. This relative local independence would enable them to be, as far as possible, representative of their communities and protected from the impersonal dynamics of large centralized structures. (Teixeira, 1968, p. 35)

It is noteworthy, in Teixeira's theoretical framework, that in establishing parameters for a new form of education capable of preparing individuals for a new society, he turns to enduring principles—drawing on qualities of simpler and smaller societies, and on values rooted in the local and the immediate—despite recognizing the democratic state as pluralistic, in contrast to the homogenizing spirit of non-democratic states.

Education and schooling, which must unequivocally assume a public character, constitute the institutional apparatus that society must strengthen in pursuit of social cohesion. In its democratic orientation, education must prepare individuals for plurality and diversity, serving multiple and complex interests. In Teixeira's view (1968, p. 36), “public school is, par excellence, the school of the community, the institution most responsive to the needs of all social groups and most capable of contributing to the cohesion and integration of the community as a whole.” As a plural institution, the public school is both a formative agent and an outcome of democratic societies.

Reflecting on the history of education in Brazil, Teixeira (1968) emphasizes that, as a Portuguese colony, the country was marked by the authoritarian character of traditional institutions. Its foundations included patriarchy, feudalism, slavery, aristocratic structures, and even theocratic tendencies introduced by the Jesuits. Unlike other European countries, where Renaissance ideas in the sixteenth century began to promote individual expansion, Portugal remained attached to older frameworks—feudal and lordship-based forms of social organization—and even showed tendencies to revert to medieval religious models due to the Counter-Reformation. Democratic and liberal ideas reached Brazil less as a result of a structured project of social transformation and more as a consequence of institutional inefficiency, unlike the processes observed in Europe and the United States.

Considering the Pombaline Reforms of the eighteenth century, the author notes the establishment of royal schools in Brazil, primarily aimed at training civil servants, a function they maintained until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Teixeira (1968) highlights

that, during the Brazilian Empire, education experienced a prolonged period of stagnation, limited essentially to the creation of Colégio Pedro II and institutes for the blind and deaf in the capital. In his words (Teixeira, 1968, p. 71), this period “could be summarized as the conjunction of the worst elements of enlightened despotism with the worst elements of the Liberal State.” The liberal movements that led to the establishment of the Republic also contributed to the emergence of a middle class and introduced new dynamism into education. Nevertheless, schools continued to follow a European-inspired dual system, consisting of one model for the general population and another for the elite. The former, municipally administered and staffed by lay teachers, provided only rudimentary literacy. The latter, administered at the state level, served the elite, enjoyed high social prestige, and focused extensively on classical studies, often lasting seven or eight years. This system of class privilege contradicted the ideological foundations of democratic theory.

Democracy is not the ideally best form of government unless this weakness is corrected; unless it can be so organized that no class, not even the most numerous, is capable of reducing all others to political insignificance by directing legislation and administration exclusively in its own class interest. (Mill, 2006, p. 135)

Teixeira (1968) observes that, in the 1920s and 1930s, the onset of industrialization and the population’s demand for access to educational benefits led to the expansion of state primary education. However, this expansion was accompanied by deterioration in quality and a loss of institutional prestige.

From the 1920s onward, a structural shift occurred. The emerging middle class began to seek access to secondary and higher education, while the general population was confined to a shortened form of primary schooling, typically limited to four years and often delivered in multiple daily shifts—reaching, in some school groups in major cities such as São Paulo, up to four shifts per day. Teacher training at the primary level, which had previously achieved reasonable standards in normal schools established during the Empire—among the earliest in the continent—declined as a consequence of this shift in the function of primary education, which transitioned from serving a few to serving many, if not all. (Teixeira, 1968, p. 74)

A class-based conflict of interests regarding education thus emerged in the country. On one hand, the middle class sought to secure the advantages and privileges formerly reserved for the elite, advocating for expanded access to secondary and higher education. On the other hand, the working classes demanded broader access to and greater investment in public education. For Teixeira (1968), resolving this conflict required dismantling the dual system and establishing a unified educational framework capable of integrating these competing pressures into a progressive and cohesive movement in favor of the national education system.

The establishment of universal suffrage in the 1940s appeared to signal the formation of a democratic society. Changes in the social context aimed to overcome the division between elites and the masses, promoting national integration through the recognition of rights that render all citizens equal before the law. These new conditions demanded profound transformations in an education system that had thus far maintained a traditional and elitist structure.

Overcoming the divide between theoretical and practical knowledge would mark the beginning of a new common school for all, designed to transmit the accumulated knowledge of the past, enabling an understanding of the present and preparation for the future. This new school, suited to a new society, should receive students from early childhood education and guide them through a continuous intellectual development process, culminating in diversified professional paths—scientific, literary, and artistic—aligned with individual aptitudes and Teixeira (1968) identifies three systems as fundamental to a genuinely democratic experience: the education system, the research system, and the system for the dissemination of knowledge. Although these systems formally exist in democratic societies, they do not always function effectively. The result is an ongoing tension between private and public interests. This contradiction constitutes one of the central social challenges, requiring social scientists to develop research aimed at identifying shared public interests capable of aligning different social groups and supporting the formulation of modern legislation that reflects collective needs.

It can therefore be concluded that the formation of such a society depends on universal access to education, as only education can prepare citizens who, in a cohesive manner and through the diversification of their capacities, contribute to the development of a free, democratic, and advanced nation. It is from this understanding that Teixeira formulates his conception of education as a right. In his words:

The right to education becomes a right of all because education is no longer a process of specialization for a few in specific social functions, but the formation of each individual and of all individuals for their contribution to an integrated and national society, which is taking shape through changes in the nature of work and in human relations. To state that education is a right is to formally and explicitly recognize that education is a public interest, to be promoted by law. (Teixeira, 1968, p. 48)

Thus, schooling may represent an advantage, but it must primarily be understood as a social necessity and a right to be guaranteed. For Teixeira (1968, p. 50), “it is from this common education that students will diversify, according to their aptitudes, in order to achieve, by merit, their respective positions in an open, dynamic, and progressive class society into which Brazilian society is being transformed.” Education for all must not degenerate into a system of individual advantage. This occurs when interest in schooling is reduced to the acquisition of credentials that grant privileges in the competitive dynamics of a class-based society emerging in Brazil. Such a perspective fails to recognize education as a foundation for building a democratic society, instead prioritizing certifications that may be obtained through complacency or corruption. In this regard, a contemporary issue to be problematized is the expansion of higher education provision, which has fostered the commodification of diplomas and degrees, resulting in declining educational quality and the failure to fulfill the social function that underpins formal education.

Within the complex context of Brazilian education, greater progress could be observed in federal universities. According to Teixeira (1968), this was due to the autonomy granted to these institutions. In contrast, state and municipal education sectors experienced significant neglect, particularly as political appointees assumed leadership positions in education departments, undermining their professional character. Teixeira raises the following question:

Can this be the way in which the country will respond to the genuine awakening of the nation to its educational needs, to the explicit recognition in the Constitution of the individual right to education, and to the necessity of reconstructing the school to serve the new conditions of a country advancing toward industrialization, self-awareness, and the intense democratization of its political, economic, and social life? (Teixeira, 1968, p. 77)

The Brazilian Constitution of 1946, reaffirming principles already established in the 1934 Constitution, states that education is a right of all and must be provided both in the home and at school, as follows:

On Education and Culture. Art. 166 – Education is a right of all and shall be provided in the home and at school. It shall be inspired by principles of freedom and ideals of human solidarity. Art. 167 – Education in its various branches shall be provided by public authorities and is open to private initiative, subject to the laws that regulate it. (Baleeiro, 2012, p. 88)

Teixeira (1968) argues that this constitutional provision establishes the shared responsibility of the federal government, states, and municipalities to provide primary education to all Brazilians. He emphasizes that, according to the Constitution, education must begin in the home. Although the new democratic society seeks to be pluralistic and decentralized, it cannot disregard the principle that children are educated and socialized within the family, understood as the primary association. Therefore, it is essential that primary schools be closely connected to and integrated with their local communities.

The education system established by the Constitution should thus be tripartite: the federal government would be responsible for establishing national guidelines and frameworks; the states, for organization, as provided in Article 171; and municipal authorities, for administration. While recognizing the importance of primary education in relation to local contexts, its provision must maintain a national character and value to ensure system-wide integration.

In this way, the primary school, although local, will reflect only partially the cultural level and economic conditions of the locality. Indeed, the greatest drawback of educational localism, conceived as absolute, would be the economic and cultural inequalities prevailing among municipalities, which would lead to unequal student formation depending on where they live. (Teixeira, 1968, p. 56)

Teixeira (1968) advocates for the establishment of collegiate bodies of a lay composition—Education Councils. These councils, composed of parents and community representatives, would serve as a defining feature of genuinely democratic education. Being

decentralized, they would receive constitutionally allocated resources and exercise autonomous administration in accordance with the law. As Teixeira (1968, p. 69) states:

autonomous and accountable, integrated into their respective contexts, composed of lay rather than technical members, by entrusting education to such Councils, the formation of Brazilians would be placed in the hands of Brazilian society itself—in its local diversity, its regional variety, and its national unity.

In essence, this model envisions a system in which society itself assumes responsibility for education, reflecting confidence in the national community. Local administration would also function as a safeguard against the tendency toward irresponsibility observed in large, mechanical, and impersonal public organizations. In another of his works, Teixeira states:

The new public school, under municipal or autonomous administration, would not cease to be state-level by virtue of its teachers, trained and certified by the state, although appointed by local bodies, nor by the technical assistance and teaching materials developed at the state level. Nor, it should be noted, would it cease to be federal, given its adherence to national education laws and guidelines, as well as potential financial and technical support from federal agencies. (Teixeira, 1994, p. 74)

This constitutes the author's proposal: an education system organized in a decentralized manner, with autonomous and locally based administration, as the foundation for restructuring and realigning the educational institution in Brazil. This model emphasizes the study of national language, history, and civilization, alongside universal mathematical and scientific knowledge, thereby fostering both local and universal values.

The participatory school management model proposed by Teixeira, as a means of ensuring the democratic character of education, has become a subject of extensive debate among scholars in the field. Addressing democratic management, Zardo-Moriescho, Esquinsani, and Zilli (2025) sought to understand the perceptions of teachers in the state education system of Santa Catarina on this issue and found that:

In the state of Santa Catarina, government policies represented by Decree No. 1,794 (Santa Catarina, 2013) and Decree No. 194 (Santa Catarina, 2019a) enabled the school

community to resume participation in school management and in the selection of the School Management Plan. (Zardo-Moriescho et al., 2025)

The measures established by these decrees allowed education professionals within the state system to submit proposals and compete for school principal positions. However, it cannot yet be asserted that these initiatives have effectively consolidated democratic management practices in the school environment, indicating that participation in educational governance remains a contested domain.

Teixeira, while recognizing democracy as the most appropriate system for a plural society, criticizes the liberal model that reduces democracy to a mechanism for selecting political representatives in the formation of governments and parliaments, whose legitimacy is confined to the electoral process, thereby equating political dynamics with market logic. The author advocates for popular participation in the management of education as the desirable model.

In alignment with Teixeira's perspective, new models of democracy have been proposed to strengthen citizen participation in public decision-making. Among these are Participatory Democracy, Associative Democracy, and Deliberative Democracy (Lüchmann, 2012).

Participatory Democracy, according to Lüchmann (2012), may be defined as follows: "democracy thus means restoring to citizens the exercise of political activity that, in modern democracies, has been alienated or transferred to elected representatives" (Lüchmann, 2012, p. 64). Within this framework, the democratic ideal seeks citizen self-government, challenging the notion that political apathy is a natural and widespread feature of social life, and reaffirming that governance by the people must indeed be exercised by the people.

Associative Democracy (Lüchmann, 2012) is defined as a model in which democratic self-governance is carried out through groups and associations. This model emphasizes the role of associations in addressing the limitations of the classical liberal electoral model in responding to contemporary social, political, and economic transformations.

Deliberative Democracy (Lüchmann, 2012) proposes a reconfiguration of political power grounded in a reordering of the liberal democratic model. Its proponents argue that the legitimacy of political decisions should emerge from processes of discussion guided by the principles of inclusion, pluralism, participatory equality, autonomy, and the common good.

These three contemporary models converge on a central premise: democracy requires continuous formation. The mere existence of political institutions is insufficient; a democratic culture is essential.

Anísio Teixeira anticipated this understanding by asserting that public education constitutes a structural condition for the consolidation of democracy. Democracy requires active subjects; it depends on organized cooperation and presupposes argumentative competence. These dimensions are primarily developed within the school environment.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Anísio Teixeira articulated highly refined conceptions of education as a fundamental condition for the realization of democracy. This principle is embedded in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (the “Citizen Constitution”), in which education is established as a right to be guaranteed by the State with a view to fostering citizenship. In this regard, the Brazilian government took a significant step by enacting Law No. 14,644 of August 2, 2023, which amends the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education and mandates the establishment of School Councils and Forums of School Councils in states, municipalities, and the Federal District, with the aim of promoting democratic governance in public education (Brazil, 2023). Under this law, the School Council, as a deliberative body, is composed of the school principal, as an *ex officio* member, and representatives of the school and local communities, elected by their peers. The Forums of School Councils, in turn, consist of two representatives from the body responsible for the education system and two representatives from each School Council within the Forum’s jurisdiction. Their purpose is to ensure the implementation of democratic processes within educational institutions and across decision-making levels, with a view to improving educational quality (Brazil, 2023).

Despite the recognized importance of the legal framework, the effective implementation of participatory systems remains contested, as access to and retention in school are still not guaranteed for all students in the country. Indeed, the inequalities reflected in broader social indicators are also present in the educational sphere, highlighting the need for awareness and mobilization among less advantaged segments of the population. According to Bittencourt (2025), antagonisms and conflicts are inherent features of democratic societies. Democracy is understood as a processual and evolving phenomenon, having undergone transformations from its original formulations to the present. Therefore, institutional action is required to counteract

the perception of others as adversaries to be eliminated; “in this sense, public schools provide a fertile ground—through collegiate bodies and the election of principals—for learning democracy and exercising agonism” (Bittencourt, 2025, p. 1). Continuous vigilance is thus required, as democracy was not guaranteed in the past, is not guaranteed in the present, and will not be guaranteed in the future.

Moreover, contemporary debates on education and democracy have expanded to encompass citizenship education and human rights. In this context, “education for democracy and human rights education are challenged by the contemporary sociopolitical environment, requiring critical reflection on teacher education and pedagogical practices” (Tomizaki, 2024). This perspective underscores the need to integrate into school practices both content and methodologies that promote students’ critical awareness of how democratic societies function.

Education is often assigned a quasi-messianic role as the redeemer of society; however, it itself requires transformation. Such transformation may be achieved through measures such as ensuring that national education management is not subject to political control, promoting decentralized administration, implementing community-based oversight mechanisms, valuing the teaching profession, and fostering forms of instruction that are locally grounded while maintaining global relevance.

This article presents limitations inherent to the absence of empirical investigation capable of confronting conceptual frameworks with concrete practices developed in Brazilian schools. Nevertheless, the theoretical approach proves essential for critically examining the categories of education and democracy in light of the author’s work. Thus, without exhausting the subject, this study contributes to advancing scholarly debate and to consolidating a field of reflection that is indispensable for understanding the relationship between schooling and democracy in the Brazilian context.

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