

ARTICLE

DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL MANAGEMENT: WHAT THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS FROM THE STATE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF SANTA CATARINA SAY¹

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to present the perceptions of teachers belonging to the Santa Catarina state education network about democratic school management. It corresponds to an excerpt from a research project, the problem surrounding the perceptions of basic education teachers from this network about democratic management in the day-to-day running of their schools. The research is characterized as qualitative and quantitative, with the analysis of data obtained from applying an *online* questionnaire to teachers in the state education network. It also includes a discussion of the government policies that regulate school management in the state network, Decree No. 1,794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013) and Decree No. 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a). Among the theoretical references that underpin the analysis, we highlight Cury (2007), Vieira (2007), Souza (2009; 2012), Lima (2013), who discuss the concepts related to democratic management; Alves (2019), Palú and Petry (2020), problematize liberal democracy, which delimits democratic management in schools; and consequently, compromises the recognition and participatory parity (Fraser, 2002; 2006; 2007) of teachers. Although the results indicate that democratic management is materializing in state schools, some teachers do not recognize it, which may be associated with successive government policies that limit participation and delay the implementation of democratic school management.

Keywords: Educational policy, democratic management, teachers' perceptions, Santa Catarina state education network.

¹ Article published with funding from the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* - CNPq/Brazil for editing, layout and XML conversion services. The translation of this article into English was funded by Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - CAPES/Brasil.

GESTÃO ESCOLAR DEMOCRÁTICA: O QUE DIZEM AS PERCEPÇÕES DE PROFESSORES DA REDE ESTADUAL DE ENSINO DE SANTA CATARINA

RESUMO: O artigo tem como objetivo apresentar as percepções de professores pertencentes à rede estadual de ensino de Santa Catarina sobre a gestão escolar democrática. Corresponde a um excerto de pesquisa, cujo problema circundou as percepções de professores de educação básica da referida rede, sobre a gestão democrática, no cotidiano de suas escolas. A pesquisa se caracteriza como qualitativa e quantitativa, com a análise de dados obtidos a partir da aplicação de questionário *online*, aos docentes da rede estadual de ensino. Contempla também uma discussão das políticas de governo que regulamentam a gestão escolar na rede estadual, o Decreto nº 1.794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013) e o Decreto nº 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a). Dentre os referenciais teóricos que sustentam a análise, destaca-se Cury (2007), Vieira (2007), Souza (2009; 2012), Lima (2013), que discutem os conceitos atinentes à gestão democrática; Alves (2019), Palú e Petry (2020), problematizam a democracia liberal, que delimita a gestão democrática nas escolas; e conseqüentemente, compromete o reconhecimento e a paridade participativa (Fraser, 2002; 2006; 2007) dos docentes. Apesar de os resultados indicarem que a gestão democrática se materializa nas escolas estaduais, existem professores que não a reconhecem, o que pode estar associado às sucessivas políticas de governo, que limitam a participação e retardam a efetivação de uma gestão escolar democrática.

Palavras-chave: Política educacional, gestão democrática, percepção de professores, rede estadual de ensino de Santa Catarina.

GESTIÓN ESCOLAR DEMOCRÁTICA: QUÉ DICEN LAS PERCEPCIONES DE LOS PROFESORES DE LA RED ESTATAL DE EDUCACIÓN DE SANTA CATARINA

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo es presentar las percepciones de profesores pertenecientes a la red estatal de educación de Santa Catarina sobre la gestión democrática de la escuela. Corresponde a un extracto de un proyecto de investigación, cuyo problema se centró en las percepciones de los profesores de educación básica de la referida red sobre la gestión democrática en el día a día de sus escuelas. La investigación se caracteriza por ser cualitativa y cuantitativa, con un análisis de los datos obtenidos a partir de la aplicación de un cuestionario *en línea* a los profesores de la red estatal de enseñanza. También incluye un análisis de las políticas gubernamentales que regulan la gestión escolar en la red estatal, el Decreto n.º 1.794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013) y el Decreto n.º 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a). Entre las referencias teóricas que fundamentan el análisis, se destacan Cury (2007), Vieira (2007), Souza (2009; 2012), Lima (2013), quienes discuten los conceptos relacionados con la gestión democrática; Alves (2019), Palú y Petry (2020), los cuales problematizan la democracia liberal, que delimita la gestión democrática en las escuelas; y conseqüentemente, compromete el reconocimiento y la paridad participativa (Fraser, 2002; 2006; 2007) de los docentes. Si bien los resultados indican que la gestión democrática está ocurriendo en las escuelas estatales, hay docentes que no la reconocen, lo que puede estar asociado a las sucesivas políticas gubernamentales que limitan la participación y retrasan la implementación de la gestión escolar democrática.

Palabras clave: Política educativa, gestión democrática, percepción de los profesores, red de educación del estado de Santa Catarina.

INTRODUCTION: INTRODUCING THE TEXT AND ITS PURPOSES

In Brazil, research on educational policies has been standing out as a distinct field of investigation and seeking consolidation. According to Mainardes, Ferreira, and Tello (2011), it can be observed through the significant increase in publications, groups, and lines of research in postgraduate programs and specific events related to social and educational policies. Considering the context, research on educational policy is necessary, especially in what Ball and Mainardes (2011) say about policies, in which, while they can be presented in an obscure way, they can also be powerful instruments for announcing paths of transformation. Thus, the role of research on educational policies is highlighted, in the sense of exploring them, demystifying them, contextualizing them in practice, analyzing how they can be successful or predestined to failure; whether they are instruments that guarantee access to and permanence in a quality education, or whether they are excessively discriminating and dominating government policies.

Since educational policy is the object of study, Morosini and Fernandes (2014) emphasize the need to contextualize it in the historical, social, and scientific fields in which it is related. For Dourado (1998), when situating Brazilian educational policies and, within them, dealing with democratic management, it is necessary to rescue the links and commitments that guide educational policy, its interpretations and formulations, restricted conditions of participation subordinated to social control, including the conceptions and interests that lead to effective citizen participation.

With the redemocratization of Brazil in the 1980s, the promulgation of the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988 became evident, which established a Democratic State, ensuring in the article 205 that education is a right for all and a duty of the State and the family (Brazil, 1988). A similar process occurs in the management of education, which is highlighted in article 206 of the Federal Constitution of 1988, in its section VI, which determines democratic school management, a principle that is also ensured in Law 9,394 of 1996, in its article 3, section VIII, which regulates public education to have democratic management in compliance with the provisions of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB-*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional*) and the legislation of education systems (Brazil, 1996).

The National Education Plan (PNE-*Plano Nacional de Educação*), approved by Law 13,005 of June 25, 2014, also sets out guidelines for democratic management, intentions reinforced in its article 9, imposing on states, the Federal District, and municipalities the approval of laws that regulate democratic management in their education systems, as well as in goal 19, which presents strategies for its implementation (Brazil, 2014). In the state of Santa Catarina, throughout history, the processes of democratization of education have been turbulent. In the 1980s, democratic management also began to be oriented towards public schools. However, the democratic principles in the state education system were shaken in 1997, when the selection of school leaders through direct elections was considered unconstitutional (Brazil, 1997), and political appointments by the executive branch began to directly influence the occupation of school leadership positions.

Throughout the 1990s, the participation and resistance of teachers in favor of the democratization of education stood out, which contributed to the elaboration of the Santa Catarina Curricular Proposal (Santa Catarina, 1991; 1998a; 1998b; 2005; 2014), and currently, the Base Curriculum of the Santa Catarina Territory (Santa Catarina, 2019b; 2020). However, in the reality of state public schools, movements in favor of democratization have been put to the test, especially with government policies, which often contribute to delaying the materialization of democratic school management in the state education network of Santa Catarina.

In 2013, school management began to show signs of resuming participation, with the publication of Decree 1,794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013), which regulated school management of basic and professional education in the state education system, granting the community the right to participate in choosing the School Management Plan (PGE-*Plano de Gestão Escolar*) and, consequently, the school manager. However, after its publication, Decree 1,794/2013 underwent several reformulations, revoked in 2019 and replaced by Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a). Given the facts, the dynamics of school management movements in the state education system of Santa Catarina can be observed, as well as its submission to government policies.

Democratic school management goes beyond the choice of the public school manager. Democratic management “is a process of learning and political struggle” (Dourado, 1998, p. 79) that goes beyond the limits of educational practice and its autonomy, envisioning in it “the possibility of creating channels for effective participation and learning of the democratic ‘game’, and consequently of rethinking the authoritarian power structures that permeate social relations and, within these, educational practices” (idem). Souza (2009) highlights that democratic management is a political process of identifying existing problems in the school, discussing, reflecting, and making decisions to overcome them. In this way, democratic management materializes in the school environment through a political process involving learning and participation.

Considering the perceptions of teachers working in the state education system of Santa Catarina about democratic management, it can be stated that, in addition to giving a voice to education professionals, it also aims to investigate whether the democratic school management announced in educational policies materializes in public schools. Thus, this study started from the problem: what do the perceptions of basic education teachers in the state education system of Santa Catarina reveal about democratic school management in the daily life of their schools? The research, which considered empirical data produced through an online questionnaire, with the participation of teachers from the state education system of Santa Catarina, is based on the pluralist epistemological theoretical conception (Tello; Mainardes, 2012), is characterized as exploratory, with qualitative and quantitative analysis, based on descriptive sampling by non-probabilistic judgment (Oliveira, 2001) and (Sweeney; Williams; Anderson, 2016). Its basis of analysis is the analytical-reconstructive method and identifies with the post-structuralist theoretical strand (Mainardes, 2006).

In its approach, the text is subdivided into two sections: Democratic management and its dynamics in public schools in the state of Santa Catarina; and Teachers' perceptions of democratic management. The first section broadly addresses concepts related to management in the educational context. However, it details democratic school management and the importance of education in favor of democracy. It problematizes liberal democracy, which limits democratic management in schools, compromising participatory parity (Fraser, 2002; 2006; 2007), especially among education professionals working in the state education system of Santa Catarina in school management. The topic ends with a brief documentary analysis regarding state and government policies that regulate school management in the system, discussing the advances and limitations of a careful democratic reopening. The second section presents the analysis of empirical data obtained with the participation of teachers from the state education system of Santa Catarina. State and government policies are compared, discussing the advances that democratic management would have in schools belonging to the network if it were guaranteed by law.

At the same time that teachers' perception reveals that democratic management materializes in schools, recognized through the indication of practices and mechanisms that belong to it, there are professionals who do not recognize its presence, a fact that may be a reflection of successive government policies that directly influence the dynamics of school management, postponing the implementation of democratic school management in the state education network.

DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT AND ITS DYNAMICS IN THE STATE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN SANTA CATARINA

To understand what democratic management is about, it is necessary to define its concept. However, it is essential to recognize the context that surrounds it, generally a field permeated by disputes and opposing interests. Its meaning, immediately, refers to the idea of participation, representation of a political act, and the guarantee of participatory parity (Fraser, 2002). However, its effectiveness depends on an educational policy regulating it, which generally does not have neutrality.

When moving toward the concept of democratic school management, the word management is initially defined. While it is directly related to the act of administering, management can be conceptualized as the action of gestating, generating, and comparing with the act of genesis and development. “Management is a term that comes from Latin and means: to take upon oneself, to carry, to call to oneself, to execute, to exercise, to generate” (Cury, 2007, p. 493). Reflecting broadly,

management encompasses both the creation and the conduction of a process that requires the implementation of the meaning of creating, managing, administering, through actions so that it actually materializes.

Therefore, approaching it in an educational context and, based on the legislation that affects education, Vieira (2007, p. 60) conceptualizes management according to the spheres in which it is applied:

[...] educational management refers to the scope of educational systems; school management concerns educational establishments; democratic management, in turn, constitutes a “transversal axis”, and may or may not be present in one or another sphere.

After conceptualizing education management according to the sphere in which it occurs, school management is highlighted here, emphasizing that it requires being conducted, cared for, and carefully monitored to contribute to a school's purpose; following current legislation, without disregarding the school context and its reality, extending beyond the representation of the manager. Thus, to be democratic, management calls for democracy, resulting from the participation of teachers, students, and parents, who are the segments that make up the school, dialoguing and deciding collectively. Thus, management with a democratic basis is materialized, aligned with educational policies, contributing to the performance of a long-term school project, and thought out collectively.

In his approach, the term democratic management requires that the concepts that define it be explained to understand its importance in the school environment. It is emphasized that both democracy and democratic school management are political acts. Thus, management is fulfilled in the action of politics, for the materialization of power, considering that “management is the execution of politics, it is where politics operates and power is done” (Souza, 2012, p. 159). Vieira (2007) ratifies Souza's arguments (2012), emphasizing that policies translate the intentions of public authorities and, when transformed into practices, materialize in management. Arosa (2016) highlights the central position of the State in the elaboration and implementation of educational policies, proving its role as a regulator of policies. In this direction, in its actions, public power represents the intentionality of the policy that to be materialized it depends directly on who operates the management, the interests that are conducive to its implementation, and the results that it can bring about.

By opening up to the school community and its segments, management provides a democratic experience, providing access to knowledge, discussion, and decision-making that concerns the school. The actions are characterized by the presence, expansion, and qualification of decision-making forums, respecting the school community, its subjects, and its processes, and transparency in the actions and application of resources (Esquinsani; Dametto, 2018).

The submission of the School Management Plan (PGE) was initially regulated by Decree 1,794/2013, with determinations on school management of basic and professional education in the state of Santa Catarina (Santa Catarina, 2013). Over the years, Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a) favored the participation of education professionals from the state education network of Santa Catarina in school management, however, the participation was regulated by criteria previously established in government policies.

When Saviani (2017, p. 654) conceptualizes democracy “as a political regime based on popular sovereignty, in other words, in this regime the sovereign is no longer the king, a monarch but the people who now hold the prerogative of choosing their rulers,” he reinforces the proposition of the power of decision and choice of the people through the participation of the subjects for the performance of democratic actions. However, the author points out that the materialization of democracy requires education for the population, in which the school plays a fundamental role in the construction of democracy; representing the idea of “the ‘school that redeems humanity’ under whose aegis the campaign for public, universal, compulsory, free and secular education is launched, made possible, in each country, by the organization of the respective national education system.”

The Democratic State, established by the Constitution (Brazil, 1988), ensures equality for all before the law. However, when it comes to material and political equality, it is clear in the current context that the ideal proposed by the Constitution faces contradictions in its implementation such as a democracy with liberal bases. This shows a society marked by material, opportunity, and political disparities, far from the ideal of equality established by law.

Alves (2019) states that the liberal democracy encourages individualism and limits government power. Thus, both disputes of interest between groups and agreements to achieve certain objectives become clearer, enabled through periodic elections. The author also points out that liberal conceptions of democracy reveal the democratic process as a way of programming the State in the interest of society, whose legal order is presented based on subjective rights and operates by deciding which rights apply to each particularity. These principles “end up postulating the precedence of human rights over popular sovereignty (the will of the people)” (p. 144). It is identified that the guarantee of rights established in legislation is subject to a game of disputes, motivated by forces that control democracy. A society is being built, marked by individualism, which serves the interests of a minority, evidencing the lack of attention to most of the population, involved in a movement of “formation of the will, of persuasion and of power that is extremely elitist, defending the prevailing interests and the market, even when using deliberation, the use of reason and representative and direct democratic procedures” (Alves, 2019, p. 145). As a result, education becomes hostage to this control, even compromising democratic school management.

When discussing the concept of democracy, it is important to delve into the debate on participatory parity, by Nancy Fraser (2002; 2006; 2007) to discuss overcoming different social injustices, in this case, school management, to the detriment of teachers in the state education system of Santa Catarina. In a simple but very pertinent comparison between cultural/symbolic injustice and democratic school management, the political appointment of the school principal is evident, represented by a teacher who meets the requirements of a position of trust, which favors his/her permanence in management during the term of a public administration. In this regard, the power of teachers and the community is limited, and the right to choose the school manager is suppressed, presenting a management that restricts participation.

The action shows disrespect and devaluation of teachers and their participation, resulting in the postponement of democratic school management. The impediment of the participation translates into authoritarian measures, revealing a form of cultural injustice (Fraser, 2006), resulting in the submission of the school community to the designs of a politically sponsored manager. Given the facts, the opportunity for a condition of participatory parity (Fraser, 2002) becomes more meaningful when the teacher is recognized as a subject who has knowledge linked to his/her pedagogical practice, regarding democratic management processes.

Recognized as an institution for educating citizens, public schools can provide political participation in favor of democracy, which is why they are democratic spaces responsible for offering an education that guarantees access, permanence, and quality. However, schools will only educate for democracy when they allow it to be experienced, learned, and lived, involving students, teachers, and professors who are part of this context. The action represents democracy as a political act, which, according to Lima (2013), requires that it be practiced to be learned. The opportunity for teachers to be involved and participate in democratic school management demonstrates the recognition of education professionals, materializing what Fraser (2007) proposes in a participatory parity. It would be an alternative and a transformative remedy (Fraser, 2006), with the redistribution of power in favor of democratic management, repairing the political control exercised for years by those appointed to school management.

Although provided for in state policies, such as the Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988), the LDB (Brazil, 1996), the National Education Plan (Brazil, 2014) and the State Education Plan (PEE-*Plano Estadual de Educação*) (Santa Catarina, 2015), democratic school management still presents weaknesses regarding its materialization. The verb “to institute”, present in educational policies, does not always follow the cycle for its performance. In other words, although state policies institute democratic management, it is recognized that there is no guarantee of its effectiveness in school realities. According to Mendonça (2001), one of these limiting factors may be the legislation, which, depending on its intention, acts as a mechanism for controlling power, establishing criteria that end up restricting the participation of segments of the school community in democratic management.

Garcia (2017) points out that the State meets demands regarding democratic management. However, at the same time, it implements measures that comply with the demands of capital forging an education that meets the business vision. The liberal model of democracy induces education to surrender

to privatization principles, with “free individual initiative, the unquestionable autonomy of the market, the use of State apparatus and public institutions prevailing to make personal businesses viable and certify the private appropriation of collective production” (Alves, 2019, p. 144). Given what the authors point out and, analyzing the aforementioned policies, the State institutes democratic management in education. However, forces linked to neoliberal managerialism contribute to hindering and, or even delaying its implementation in public schools, since these forces influence the democracy. This control can result from international forces and their managerial elements, which are mistakenly “announced as propagators of democratic management” (Palú; Petry, 2020, p. 5).

In the state education system of Santa Catarina, Decree 1,794/2013, which was in force until 2019, established democratic management and school autonomy as principles, with the participation of the school community, in favor of educational quality and promoting transparency in pedagogical and administrative processes. School autonomy was achieved through the participation of the school community in the construction of the Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP) and the selection of the PGE (Santa Catarina, 2013).

In 2019, the government of the state of Santa Catarina published Decree 194 (Santa Catarina, 2019a), repealing Decree 1,794/2013, providing for the school management of basic and professional education in the state education system. According to Palú and Petry (2020), the aforementioned decrees are subject to international influences, which act on education in Santa Catarina, citing as an example the study commissioned by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD (2010), entitled National Education Policy Assessments: State of Santa Catarina, Brazil, which “makes an analysis and recommendations on education policy” (Palú; Petry, p. 16). To surpass the indices obtained by the OECD study, the document Proposals for new directions for the quality of education in Santa Catarina: CEE's view on the OECD assessment (Santa Catarina, 2012) was prepared, which points to school management as a central piece in overcoming the weaknesses that hinder school autonomy. Its purpose is to support managers of basic and professional education, as well as higher education, in the creation, implementation, and development of education policies, with an emphasis on the state education network to contribute to improving education in the state of Santa Catarina and Brazil.

When analyzing Decree 1,794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013) and Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a), it is revealed how the influence of these propositions (Santa Catarina, 2012) directly affects government policies, in terms of regulating school management in the state education system of Santa Catarina. The facts are confirmed by Palú and Petry (2020), when they indicate that educational policies change their course, given new management perspectives, when they affect education systems, especially when they are characterized by management models that often use “concepts and principles defended by the democratic perspective, but resignified; thus, they begin to serve other purposes, which are aligned with the neoliberal conception” (p. 9).

Comparing Decree 1,794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013) to Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a), progress has been identified, especially regarding the participation of education professionals and school representation in school management. The submission of the PGE, for those interested in occupying the role of school principal, was extended to the entire category that makes up the State Public Teaching Staff and, to the school community, the resumption of the power to choose and/or approve the proposal of who will assume school management.

Although Decree 194/2019 favors management open to participation, it has proven to be a tool for strict control, both for the involvement of teachers in submitting the PGE and about school management. The chosen PGE is subject to the signing of a Commitment Term with the State Department of Education and annual evaluation by the State Department of Education and the School Deliberative Council (*CDE-Conselho Deliberativo Escolar*). As for the appointment of the management advisor, provided for in Decree 194/2019, the criterion calls democracy into question, revealing gaps that refer to the political appointment of the school principal, an action experienced by the state education network in the 1990s.

When examining the government policies created to regulate school management, Decree 1,794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013), followed by Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a), it is observed that its content blurs the idea of democratic school management. In its text, the words: school management, participation, and autonomy are identified. However, democratic school management

demands many advances, even when limited by the rigor of Decree 194/2019. It is considered that, for democratic management to materialize in schools in the network the intention should be explicit in Decree 194/2019, since its text does not contain words such as democratic management, democratic school management, democratization, and democracy, which would strengthen the discourse, but mainly, the actions in favor of truly democratic school management.

Given this, Vieira (2007) says is confirmed when he argues that policies are responsible for translating the intentions of public authorities and are materialized in practice through management. In Santa Catarina, while government policies govern educational policies, the ideal of democratic school management is placed in the background, submitting to the interests of those who govern education.

The resumption of the participation of education professionals in the preparation and submission of the PGE and its selection together with the school community is considered a recent practice. To present the perceptions of teachers belonging to the state education network of Santa Catarina on democratic school management, the following is a discussion of the results of the empirical research, carried out between March and July of 2021.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ABOUT DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT

Since democracy is a political act and is only learned through the possibility of practicing it (Lima, 2013), it is worth noting that the participation of education professionals in the Santa Catarina state education system in school management is marked by interruptions, resulting from the alternation of government policies. Decree 1,794 (Santa Catarina, 2013) and Decree 194 (Santa Catarina, 2019a) enabled some advances in the resumption of the participation of teachers in school management. However, government policies do not assume the meaning of democratic management, are not in line with its concept, and limit its advances. Management marked by limitations is arbitrary, restricting participation. Although most of the professionals who participated in the research recognize the meaning of democratic management, a significant number still have a confused understanding of the practice. In other words, if there is no participation, there is no learning and recognition of this management model.

When comparing state policies and government policies, Oliveira (2011) addresses the differences between them, highlighting government policies as those “that the Executive decides on in an elementary process of formulating and implementing certain measures and programs, aiming to respond to the demands of the internal political agenda, even if they involve complex choices” (p. 329). State policies correspond to those “that involve more than one state agency, generally passing through Parliament or different discussion bodies, resulting in changes to other pre-existing norms or provisions, with an impact on broader sectors of society” (idem).

In the state of Santa Catarina, the government policy established by Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a) contributed to the participation of teachers in school management, both in the submission of the PGE and in its selection, actions that could be related to a transformative remedy (Fraser, 2006), of recognizing education professionals as subjects with knowledge, enabling them to identify with and contribute to the democratic management of their schools. However, the regulation of democratic management, as a state policy in Santa Catarina, would favor the overcoming of a cultural and legal injustice, suffered over a long period, marked by political appointments that defined school management, not free from ideological and/or political-partisan persecution.

However, as a transformative remedy (Fraser 2006), Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a) is still palliative. It is emphasized that the state education network requires more actions for the lasting participation of education professionals, which favors the exercise of democracy, through contributions, reflections, and learning, which could be consolidated through a state policy focused on democratic management.

By participating in and becoming part of a democratic management system, teachers assume a condition of equal status, especially in terms of participation, promoting a way of social justice, and exercising participatory parity (Fraser, 2007). Welcoming teachers' perceptions about democratic school management is establishing a condition of participatory parity, with those who speak from within the

school context, who experience the management processes, and denouncing the weaknesses of this movement. On the other hand, involving teachers' participation encourages them to think about the subject and, perhaps, induce reflections and questions about the reality of management in their schools. To gather perceptions about democratic school management among teachers belonging to the Santa Catarina State Education Network, a survey was conducted with these professionals between March and July 2021, which is part of a PhD thesis in Education. To this end, six questions were developed, corresponding to the research instrument as the base on the theoretical framework that defines democratic school management, the problem, and the research objectives proposed for the study.

After analysis and approval by the Ethics and Research Committee involving human beings, CAAE 40695320.7.0000.5342 at the University of Passo Fundo Foundation, the questionnaire was available to education professionals, with the mediation of the State Department of Education, which sent it to the Regional Education Coordinators (CRE-*Coordenadorias Regionais de Educação*). The research instrument and its description were also published on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups, which had teachers representing the CREs. To send the questionnaire to teachers, assistance was also requested from members of the Union of Education Workers in the public education system of the state of Santa Catarina (SINTE/SC-*Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Educação*).

The questionnaire, which respondents could answer at their convenience, had an initial sample size estimate of 200 respondents and, by the end of the deadline for data collection, a total of 303 responses had been obtained, which make the research corpus. Despite efforts to ensure that the calls for participation were met, the CREs of Braço do Norte, Brusque, Caçador, Dionísio Cerqueira, Ibirama, Itapiranga, Joaçaba, Joinville, Seara, Timbó and Videira had no records of participation in the research, for which reasons could not be identified. The questions, composed of multiple-choice alternatives, allowed participants to mark more than one option, according to their perceptions of democratic management. The research instrument also referred to daily school actions that permeate the scope of management, but to date, the theoretical references addressed in the research do not classify as belonging to democratic school management.

This paper discusses the question "Please indicate what democratic management means to you", presented in Table 1, followed by its analysis, which is characterized as qualitative and quantitative (Gatti, 2004); (Minayo, 2014). The qualitative analysis is based on a documentary study, which includes Decree 1,794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013) and Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a), in the interpretation of the data collected and in theoretical contributions that cover concepts related to democratic management. Quantitative analysis is based on the sample of collected data, classified as descriptive by non-probabilistic judgment (Oliveira, 2001) and (Sweeney; Williams; Anderson, 2016), for which the results are independent of factors such as gender of the respondents, age, career time, being permanent or temporarily hired in the education network, training, among others.

Table 1 - Question number 8: What is democratic management?

Indicate what democratic management means to you	Number of participants	Percentage	Relationship between democratic management and literature
To participate in the presentation and approval of the School Management Plan	218	71.9%	Yes
To participate in the selection of the school manager	198	65.3%	Yes
To give an opinion in school decision-making	238	78.5%	Yes
To participate in school assemblies involving teachers, parents and students	239	78.8%	Yes
To participate in school events	112	36%	No
To approve the Political-Pedagogical Project	195	64.3%	Yes
To collaborate with APP promotions to raise funds for the school	124	40.9%	No
To participate in ongoing training	168	55.4%	Yes
To participate in joint efforts to maintain the school building	100	33%	No
To participate in the preparation of the school calendar	192	63.3%	Yes
To talk to parents about teaching and learning	176	58%	No
To talk to parents about indiscipline	123	40.5%	No
To deal with matters related to school guidance	137	45.2%	No
To monitor the application of resources that the school receives from the state	209	68.9%	Yes
To have access to the accounts of the resources received by the school	134	44.4%	No
Others:	27	8.9%	No definition for the theme

Source: ZARDO-MORESCHO (2022)

To analyze the highlighted question, which consists of 16 multiple-choice options, the total number of responses for each alternative was initially counted. Then, the responses were grouped, counting the individuals who indicated alternatives in common. When analyzing the percentages in Table 1, most teachers recognize the actions of democratic management. The options participating in school assemblies, which involve teachers, parents, and students; giving their opinion on school decision-making; participating in the presentation and approval of the School Management Plan; and monitoring the application of resources that the school receives from the state, in addition to demonstrating higher percentages, are intertwined, since they mobilize the participation of the segments of parents, students, and teachers, in moments of dialogue, reflection, and decision-making.

The alternative “To give opinion in school decision-making”, satisfactorily represented by 78.5% of the participating teachers, reveals a fundamental element for democratic management, in which the school community interacts and participates through dialogue, possible from a condition of participatory parity (Fraser, 2002). For Cury (2007), dialogue is an extremely important instrument for the democratization of Brazilian education, according to article 205 of the Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988), and is realized in schools, through the participation of the community in the discussion of a project, in favor of the formation of individuals committed to citizenship. However, this alternative was not chosen by 21.5% of the participants, instigating doubts regarding how and to what extent these professionals participate in decision-making in the daily life of schools. As for the option “to participate

in school assemblies, involving teachers, parents and students”, this was represented by 78.8%, indicating a similar approach to the previous alternative.

School assemblies allow the participation of school management, pedagogical coordination, teachers, parents, and students. They are challenging activities, subject to disagreements, regarding the exchange of ideas, which require reaching a consensus, involving collective opinions, in a democratic movement, providing an opportunity for democratic school management. It is a time when school segments can exchange information, based on the presentation of issues that require reflection to reach appropriate decisions.

According to Araújo (2008), the action constitutes an institutional moment that enables the collective to meet for reflection and awareness, and is based on words and dialogue. Assemblies favor the construction of values of democracy and citizenship among those who participate in them, constituting a space for communication and discursive practices that promote transformative dialogues. They contribute to “increasing understanding and respect, and building coordinated actions that consider differences, increasing dialogue and collective participation in participatory decisions and agreements” (p. 117), promoting the recognition of the protagonism of the people who participate in them, with their opinions.

Regarding the choice of school principals, Jacques (2009) states that, in the 1990s, the electoral process for choosing school principals was suspended. The appointment of school principals served political and partisan interests, representing the government in power, and for the school community, it was an assimilated and naturalized practice, making their participation and power sharing impossible. Consequently, school representations were weakened, while the political and economic power of the elites was strengthened, based on a state structure alienated from the current system. The publication of Decree 1,794/2013 (Santa Catarina, 2013), which regulated the processes of participation in the management of schools belonging to the state education network of Santa Catarina, highlights the choice of the PGE as one of the actions. However, it is reiterated that democratic reintegration, through this route, is quite young. The practice of patronage and clientelism in the service of an education that served the elite, according to Mendonça (2001), demonstrated the power of the school principal in controlling a public institution, based on trust and the exchange of favors; as for a school educational project, whose external authority limits democracy among peers, carrying out democratic management from outside and over the school (Amaral, 2018).

When comparing the alternatives under discussion with the level of education, the 218 teachers who stated “participating in the presentation and approval of the School Management Plan” (PGE-*Plano de Gestão Escolar*) mostly have specialization degrees, followed by those who have a master’s degree, completed higher education and a doctorate. In the second group of responses, in the alternative “participating in the selection of the school manager”, 65.3% of the participants selected this option, those who have a specialization degree, followed by those who have a master’s degree, completed higher education and a doctorate. By crossing the data, the teachers who participated in the research are randomly distributed throughout their careers, and the level of education may have contributed decisively to the choice of alternatives related to democratic school management.

Analyzing the data, it is clear that the teachers from the state education network of Santa Catarina who responded to the survey recognize that participating in the presentation and approval of the PGE (71.9%) and participating in the selection of the school manager (63.5%) are potential actions related to democratic school management, as they experience these processes in their schools. However, most teachers failed to indicate the alternatives: 28.1% did not select the presentation and approval of the PGE; and 36.5% did not indicate the selection of the school manager.

The analysis of the data obtained raises curiosity about the determining reasons why the alternatives were not chosen by the teachers participating in the research. This fact problematizes the condition of clarity regarding democratic school management, which directly involves the participation of teachers, parents, students and school staff. The failure to recognize the presentation and approval of the PGE, regarding the choice of the school manager as actions of democratic management, raises doubts about how or if these practices occur in the schools where these professionals work. By not experiencing the experiences of democratic management, they may lack an understanding of the actions that constitute it.

Regarding teachers' perceptions of democratic management and its relationship with the approval of the Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP), a total of 195 respondents were obtained. The cross-referencing of data indicates that the level of training and longer experience in teaching are factors that may have contributed to the choice of this alternative. However, the number is worrying, since 37.5% of the total number of teachers who participated in the survey did not select this option. The preparation and approval of the PPP is an action that is directly related to democratic management, currently regulated by Decree 194/2019 (Santa Catarina, 2019a), considering the participation of the school community; through its boards or representations of the Parents and Teachers Association (APP-*Associação de Pais e Professores*), School Deliberative Council (CDE-*Conselho Deliberativo Escolar*) and Student Union. The PPP, must be based on the Santa Catarina Curricular Proposal, the National Education Plan, the State Education Plan and the Guidelines of the State Department of Education.

The number of teachers who do not relate the approval of the PPP to democratic management once again highlights doubts, in this case, regarding the occurrence of practices involving the preparation of the document, associated with the participation of teachers. The PPP is directly influenced by the dynamics of educational policies and the demands of the context in which the school operates, factors that make it necessary to constantly rework it. To this end, the participation of the school community, in the aspects concerning its preparation and approval, linked to the pedagogical work of the school, avoids reducing it to a ready-made and finished document, based on administrative principles that centralize power (Zavieruka; Bordignon, 2016).

The 37.5% of participants who did not identify the relationship between the PPP and democratic management is a result that causes some concern. The document refers to a school project, with principles that support it, based on educational policies in favor of the organization of teaching, the formation of individuals, quality conditions, access, and retention; which make the teaching and learning processes viable, as well as ensuring the participation of school segments. Belonging to a political act, it requires the participation of the school community, which proposes to think, approve and implement it, so that it materializes within them.

Regarding continuing education, in addition to being moments of study, they provide an opportunity to address and reflect on the problems that affect the school community. They allow training throughout the teaching career, driven by reflection on pedagogical action. Regarding the alternative "participating in continuing education", it was selected by only 55.4% of teachers, indicating that its relationship with democratic management was not recognized. When comparing the data with the level of education, most respondents have a specialization, followed by a master's degree and completed higher education, are distributed throughout the careers, and are tenured.

The significant percentage of teachers who did not indicate continuing education indicates that the action is not recognized in its relationship with democratic management. Freire (1996) advocates a critical teaching practice that involves a dynamic and dialectical movement of reflection by the teacher on his/her practice. Continuing education is constituted between doing and thinking about doing, in a reflection on pedagogical practice, thinking critically to improve the next practice in favor of change. Reflecting on practice overcomes the state of naive curiosity in favor of epistemological curiosity and change of consciousness.

Zavieruka and Bordignon (2016) emphasize that continuing education implies a commitment to the PPP and, consequently, to democratic management, related to everyday school situations, being essential throughout the teaching career, addressing the problems experienced in the school, in a reflective movement, which allows teachers to think, discuss and list actions to be implemented to resolve these weaknesses. When continuing education allows dialogue, the exchange of opinions, and the reaching of decisions with the collective, it favors the materialization of democratic management.

Regarding the issue of accountability and school management, the alternative "monitoring the application of resources that the school receives from the state" was selected by 68.9% of teachers. The LDB (Brazil, 1996) provides for monitoring the application of resources that the school receives, determining that education systems ensure progressive degrees of pedagogical, administrative and financial management autonomy to school units, following general public law standards.

Regarding financial resources, the research instrument option "To have access to financial statements for the resources received by the school" was chosen by 44.4% of participants. It should be

noted that financial statements are not linked to democratic management, and are different from the monitoring and application of resources that the school receives. If management is democratic, it would be desirable for the destination of the resources to be discussed in advance with the school's collegiate bodies, so that they can be applied at a later date.

The legislation already provides that the application of resources must be supported by actions designed by the school unit as a whole, and is not solely the responsibility of the school manager. According to Afonso (2018), when the school manager is accountable for his/her decisions, this applies to situations in which he/she makes decisions without the school collective. Referring to the reality of the school, the accountability can be directed to the School Council, the institution's collegiate bodies or the Ministry of Education and other bureaucratic services of the State. Accountability is a form of pressure on the principal to achieve results, directly related to accountability, "that is, ambivalent and heterogeneous processes of evaluation, accountability and responsibility" (Afonso, 2018, p. 327), an action that diverges from the concepts related to democratic school management.

As an example of the option "to have access to the financial statements of the resources received by the school", the research instrument contemplated other options that are not included in the literature researched, as actions that potentially identify democratic school management. However, these are actions in which school management is directly involved, mobilizing the participation of parents, teachers, and students to carry them out. Being present in the day-to-day activities of schools, they were indicated by a significant number of teachers who participated in the study, distributed across different levels of education, work regime and length of service in the teaching career: participating in school festivities: 36%; collaborating with APP promotions to raise funds for the school: 40.9%; participating in joint efforts for school building maintenance: 33%; talking to parents about teaching and learning: 58%; talking to parents about indiscipline: 40.5%; discussing issues related to school guidance: 45.2%; other: 8.9%. The set of information can be seen in Table 2:

Table 2 – Democratic management: what is not included in the research literature

Actions	Total
To participate in school festivities	36%
To collaborate with APP promotions to raise funds for the	40.9%
School	33%
To participate in building maintenance efforts at the school	58%
To talk to parents about teaching and learning	40.5%
To talk to parents about indiscipline	45.2%
To discuss issues related to school guidance	8.9%

Source: ZARDO-MORESCHO (2022)

When analyzing the data obtained from the alternatives, starting with the option of participating in school festivities, these allow the community to enter the school walls, get to know the space and the teachers, follow the work being done, and appreciate the students' productions. The meetings facilitate dialogue, the exchange of opinions, questions, and interaction between the subjects that belong to the school community. The participation provided by moments without so much formality may have led the participants to select the alternative as an action of democratic school management. The same criterion may have been established for the alternative of collaborating with the APP's promotions for fundraising and participating in joint efforts for the maintenance of the school's buildings. The schools whose teachers participated in the research belong to the government of the state of Santa Catarina. However, the APPs carry out movements to raise funds to cover small expenses that arise in the school's day-to-day life. This movement to raise funds involves the participation of the community, mobilizing the school management, teachers, parents, and students, with subsequent accountability.

Regarding the participation of the segments in joint efforts to maintain the school building, this is an action that is directly related to the responsibility of the government and is not linked to democratic school management. Participation in school festivities and collaboration with APP promotions can be considered as proposals for democratic management when they are conducted side by side by the school manager and the boards, through the call for the community to get involved and participate in these actions. However, when they occur in an imposing manner, without discussion, exchange of opinions, or reflections, they go against the principles of democratic management. When adhering to these proposals, there is still a lack of clarity according to the perception of teachers who participated in the research.

Regarding the alternatives that involve talking to parents about the teaching and learning process, regarding issues related to indiscipline and the handling of issues related to school guidance, the three situations involve teachers, parents, school management and, often, the students. The conversations can take place at individual moments, without a specific date for their occurrence and only with the mobilization of those concerned. Individualized actions are not thought of with and for the collective, unlike those that can be proposed in an assembly, an alternative that 239 teachers (78.8%) associated with democratic school management.

The analysis of the research data indicates that most of the participating teachers understand what democratic school management is. However, given the significant number of teachers who do not recognize democratic school management in the alternatives that composed the research instrument, the hypothesis is that the recent process of reopening the participation of the school community in the management of schools belonging to the state education network of Santa Catarina (Santa Catarina, 2013; Santa Catarina, 2019a) is raised. It is worth asking whether democratic management really has an opening that makes it possible to materialize in the schools where the teachers who participated in the study work. The data highlight the doubt regarding participation in favor of democratic management, if it is really being implemented, involving the school community, and, in this case, especially teachers; on the condition that they guarantee this right, considering their knowledge and their value (Fraser, 2006), exercising participatory parity (Fraser, 2002).

The guarantee of democratic school management, its materialization, and consequent implementation in the state education network of Santa Catarina, would be more likely with its regulation, through a state education policy, passing “through Parliament or different discussion bodies, resulting in changes to other pre-existing norms or provisions, with an impact on broader sectors of society” (Oliveira, 2011, p. 329). The action would directly favor its discussion, understanding, stability, and materialization in the state education network. The regulation of democratic management through a state policy would mitigate the uncertainties currently in line with the government policy in force, associated with the neoliberal managerial interests that have influenced the educational field since the 1990s (Palú; Petry, 2020).

It is true that the mobilizations of education professionals that took place in the 1980s were fundamental for the elaboration of educational policies, such as the PEE and the Santa Catarina Curricular Proposal, as well as in the defense of democratic management, in favor of the choice of school principals (Buemo, 2016), (Goularti Filho; Rabelo, 2019), (Palú; Petry, 2020). Political and critical training of education professionals is essential for reflecting on the importance of democratic school management, provided at times that favor exchanges and debates among themselves, as well as in ongoing training in service. The politicization of education professionals can favor both the mobilization of the category and its representatives, as well as their participation and guarantee of democratic management, as well as in the demand and defense of rights throughout their careers.

Regulating democratic school management by law would be decisive for its stability in practice, effectively guaranteeing the participation of the school community and its representatives in actions aimed at its materialization. This participation reinforces Lima (2016), when the author proposes that the democratic exercise is learned when democracy is practiced, by the participation that needs to be guaranteed.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the state of Santa Catarina, government policies represented by Decree 1,794 (Santa Catarina, 2013) and Decree 194 (Santa Catarina, 2019a) favored the school community's resumption of participation in school management and the choice of the School Management Plan. The action enabled the participation of education professionals from the state network in submitting their proposals and running for the position of school principal. Considering a recent past, in which the political-party nomination of the school principal was a naturalized fact, participating in the electoral process by submitting the PGE is the resumption of a right, in a condition of participatory parity (Faser, 2002; 2006; 2007).

The results of the survey with teachers from the state education system in Santa Catarina indicate that teachers recognize democratic management in their schools. The analysis indicates that the level of training of teachers may have contributed to the selection of alternatives corresponding to the theme. However, two aspects that require reflection are observed: a. the level of training was not yet sufficient for a considerable number of teachers, regarding the choice of actions related to the theme under study; b. on the other hand, the results of the survey may be an indication that the actions related to democratic management are not implemented in the daily school routine.

When revisiting government policies, represented by Decree 1,794 (Santa Catarina, 2013), succeeded by Decree 194 (Santa Catarina, 2019a), which regulates the school management of basic and professional education in the state education network of Santa Catarina, and when comparing its content with the Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988) and the legislation that establishes democratic management, such as the LDB (Brazil, 1996), the National Education Plan (Brazil, 2014), and the State Education Plan (PEE) (Santa Catarina, 2015), the decrees meet what is designated as state policies. However, it should be remembered that a government policy, in addition to establishing its control criteria, does not offer guarantees of stability in management open to participation, which would have greater chances of being effective if it were regulated by a state policy (Oliveira, 2011). Management open to participation favors the exercise of democracy and, consequently, broadens the understanding of democracy (Lima, 2016) and, consequently, what democratic school management refers to.

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Submitted: 07/02/2023

Preprint: 06/21/2023

Approved: 02/12/2024

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1 - Design and development of the project, data collection, data analysis, writing of the text and review of the final version of the article.

Author 2 - Supervision of the research, active participation in the development of the research instruments and data analysis, writing of the text, and review of the final version of the article.

Author 3 - Co-supervision of the research, active participation in the data analysis, writing of the text, and review of the final version of the article.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.