ARTICLE

REVISITING AND RECONSTRUCTING A CONCEPT OF DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION[1]

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ABSTRACT: This article develops a theoretical study on the democratic administration of schools and public education, considering it as a principle, method, and educational purpose. To this end, it revisits a concept previously developed by the author himself, as well as deepens, reflects, and conceptually analyzes elements that constitute the notion of democratic administration in education in Brazil, aiming to build a concept that not only helps in understanding the phenomenon of democratic administration and its different versions but also helps in the analysis of concrete cases of implementation of policies and processes of democratization of education and school administration. Based on Norberto Bobbio's democratic theory, the article revisits the concept of democratic administration and reconstructs it, increasing fundamental aspects with a view to a more effective theoretical formulation. This concept articulates the procedural, collective, and pedagogical dimensions of democratic administration, with democratizing elements such as dialogue, otherness, participation, and transparency.

Keywords: democratic administration, school administration, educational administration, public education.

REVISITANDO E RECONSTRUINDO UM CONCEITO DE GESTÃO DEMOCRÁTICA DA EDUCAÇÃO

RESUMO: Este artigo desenvolve um estudo teórico sobre a gestão democrática da escola e da educação pública, pensando-a como princípio, método e fim educacional. Para tanto, revisita um conceito elaborado anteriormente pelo próprio autor, bem como aprofunda, reflete e analisa conceitualmente elementos que constituem a noção de gestão democrática da educação no Brasil. Essa revisão conceitual visa a formulação mais específica de um conceito que auxilie não só na compreensão sobre o fenômeno da gestão democrática e suas diversas faces, como também ajude na análise de casos concretos de implementação de políticas e de processos de democratização da gestão da educação e da escola. Com base na teoria democrática de Norberto Bobbio, o artigo retorna a um conceito de gestão democrática e o reconstrói, acrescentando a ele aspectos fundamentais com vistas a uma elaboração teórica mais efetiva.

Esse conceito articula a dimensão processual, coletiva e pedagógica, da gestão democrática com elementos democratizadores como o diálogo, a alteridade, a participação e a transparência.

Palavras-chave: gestão democrática, gestão escolar, gestão educacional, educação pública.

REVISITANDO Y RECONSTRUYENDO UN CONCEPTO DE GESTIÓN DEMOCRÁTICA DE LA EDUCACIÓN

RESUMEN: Este artículo desarrolla un estudio teórico sobre la gestión democrática de la escuela y de la educación pública, pensándola como principio, método y fin educacional. Para tanto, revisita un concepto elaborado anteriormente por el propio autor, así como profundiza, reflexiona y analiza conceptualmente elementos que constituyen la noción de gestión democrática en la educación en Brasil, con intención de edificar un concepto que no sólo ayude a comprender el fenómeno de la gestión democrática y sus diversas caras, sino que también ayude en el análisis de casos concretos de implementación de políticas y procesos de democratización de la gestión de la educación y de la escuela. Basado en la teoría democrática de Norberto Bobbio, el artículo revisita un concepto de gestión democrática y lo reconstruye, profundizando aspectos fundamentales con enfoque a una elaboración teórica más efectiva. Este concepto articula la dimensión procesual, colectiva y pedagógica de la gestión democrática, con elementos democratizadores como el diálogo, la alteridad, la participación y la transparencia.

Palabras clave: gestión democrática, gestión escolar, gestión educacional, educación pública.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of democratic administration (DA) in public education, as outlined in article 206 of the Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988), reveals that the foundation for the administration of education and public schools lies in recognizing principles such as collectivity, participation, autonomy, dialogue, and transparency.

Collectivity is understood in two ways. First, because schools are public institutions, they can only be done in the plural: school education is a process that only happens with the involvement of many people. Second, it is important to emphasize that DA's collective nature does not imply that school education should be democratic, or at least democratically managed. Rather, the recognition of the second dimension is collective: because its existence, functioning, and purposes are in the interest of everyone. It is worth saying that all contemporary societies require school education, and even those who do not demand it, understand the right to education as a fundamental element of the common good.

Education is not just a political response to public service demands from society for better education and training. It represents a broad spectrum of societal aspirations, ranging from the most instrumental to those that see education as essential for cultural and human development in a broader sense. The point is that the educational or cultural project of a nation or people often involves school education. The decisions about the purpose and organization of schools in light of these major objectives – in addition to the small and everyday ones – rest with society. The concept of DA in education and schools comes from assuming that schools only exist collectively and that the reasons for their existence and functioning are of common interest.

This article discusses the theoretical elements that constitute democratic administration as a founding structure of education (principle), as a political, administrative, and pedagogical procedure (method), and as an educational purpose (objective). The aim is to reflect on a concept that not only helps to understand the phenomenon of democratic administration and its various aspects but also helps in the analysis of specific cases of policy implementation and processes for the democratization of

education and school administration.

To this end, the study uses Norberto Bobbio's democratic theory as a basis and analyzes aspects of the reality of school administration. Finally, the text revisits and reconstructs a concept of democratic administration (Souza, 2009a), adding fundamental aspects for a more effective theoretical elaboration.

DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION AS A PRINCIPLE, METHOD AND OBJECTIVE

The educational community, encompassing both the school community and people around an education system, is a plural group of individuals. It is not always well organized, as it is influenced by diverse and sometimes even contradictory interests. The participation of these people in the administration of the school or the education system must provide opportunities for such interests to be expressed, which requires organization.

Few individuals have been trained in democratic participation at school. The educational objectives of democracy are yet to come (Bobbio, 2024). However, democratic participation is learned in democratic practice (Souza, 2007, p. 137), as it is through participation that practice develops: "[...] a real and profound process of democratization can only arise from the base. It is unlikely that the democratization process can reach its full fulfillment starting from the top. A democracy cannot arise by decree of the king" (Bobbio, 1987, sp).

Bobbio (2000) states that true democracy cannot exist without participation. He notes that the expansion of democracy in various areas of social life has led to the establishment of rules and norms to organize participation. These regulations are not only important but also they are a necessary condition for democracy. However, Lima (2001, p. 70) points out that the regulation of spaces and procedures for participation hinders their implementation. this can cause the participation to become formal and regulated, which becomes more possible for those who govern and less for those who participate. This is a contradiction that can be summarized as follows: without rules, there is no way to guarantee fair participation; with rules, there is a limitation of the forms and scope of participation. Between one extreme and the other, the democratic principle is balanced, since the administration of schools and education requires rules that, at the same time, guarantee and delimit people's right to participate. The key to resolving this contradiction seems to lie in defining who defines the rules: whether it is the people who are called to participate or their representatives.

The definition of rules, or their absence, can both lead to non-participation (Lima, 2001). For example, an overload of protocols and complex procedures for participation can scare people away from the participation process. However, disorder or a lack of organizational parameters can also make people not want to take part in moments of discussion or deliberation, as they may feel confused or lost amid an anarchic dynamic, in the vulgar sense of the term.

However, non-participation can also be viewed from another perspective, as a political strategy. It can be a deliberate positioning of people to express their dissatisfaction or a divergent position through their non-presence or non-demonstration. According to Lima (2001, pp. 81-92), there are numerous reasons for non-participation, ranging from simple disinterest to the discomfort caused by the consequences of participation. However, I highlight non-participation as an active, intentional political aspect:

> The strength of the participation thesis leads to the incorporation of this argument by all segments of social and political life, including the most conservative or autocratic government (and school) leaders, who are initially opposed to participation. This is due to the difficulties faced by any person in remaining outside the political directions guided by the principles (such as democracy and participation) adopted by society. In reaction to the policies adopted by certain governments, it is not uncommon to find movements rejecting participation in decision-making [...] (Souza, 2007, p. 139).

This political movement of demonstrating discontent is something like a person unable to defend a position, present a candidacy or argument, but being able to reject the positions, candidacies or arguments of others. This does not normally prevent discussions and decision-making from taking place and their results from being legitimate. However, when non-participation is adopted as a political position, it will also register the displeasure of the person who chose this position.

We will see below a concept of DA that expands the idea of participation beyond decision-making processes. Unlike Bobbio, who was predominantly concerned with extensive electoral processes in a society, the administration of schools and education under the concept of democratic administration focuses on procedural and everyday matters. Therefore, the importance of community participation falls on them and not only at the moments of final decision.

In this sense, democratic participation involves defining the agenda, or, in other words, identifying problems and issues for debate. It extends to discussions and planning, decision-making, monitoring, evaluation, and control over the actions, as well as the execution and results of jointly defined actions.

However, Bobbio (2000) has already pointed out that participation is only effective when the people involved are placed in adequate conditions to do so. Therefore, the people who participate in the administration of education and schools need to have broad access to the information guided by the decision-making, monitoring, and evaluation stages, otherwise, their participation will be supervised by those who hold this same information.

Thus, situations of collective participation that are excessively regulated and do not fully guarantee access to information may be aimed only at endorsing decisions already made by the governing and/or hegemonic group (Bobbio, 1993; Bobbio, 2014). Democratic administration in education, as a principle, requires coordination, understanding, and provision of procedures that guarantee the different forms, reasons, and instances of participation of people from all school and educational segments, while also preserving the right to opt-out.

The autonomy to choose whether to participate or not – or even to define how to participate – is also a crucial aspect of DA. Encouraging and building autonomy are at the same time democratic elements and objectives. Autonomy is one of those conditions for participation.

> This has to do [...] with the valorization of participation and autonomy, understood not as self-sufficiency, but as the capacity to integrate the exogenous, that which comes from outside, as fertilizer for the endogenous. These are values that industrial societies did not promote: participation gave way to political representation; solidarity was left to the moralists because competitiveness and competition were considered more interesting and efficient. [...] Autonomy was also not promoted, because what was created were relationships of dependence, in a framework of hierarchy, without the relevant participation of each individual in decision-making (Amaro, 1996, p. 18).

This autonomy needs to be built to overcome relationships of dependence. Therefore, it cannot be *given* or *received*, since "[...] the autonomy of the school is not the autonomy of teachers, or the autonomy of parents, or the autonomy of managers. Autonomy [...] is the result of the balance of forces [...] between those who hold influence (external and internal)" (Barroso, 1996, p. 186). Furthermore, the Portuguese author adds:

> In this way, autonomy is affirmed as an expression of the social unit that is the school and does not pre-exist the actions of individuals. It is a concept constructed socially and politically, through the interaction of the different organizational actors in a school.
> This means that there is no [...] 'decreed autonomy', contrary to what underlies the most diverse 'reformist' strategies in this area. What can be decreed are formal norms and rules that regulate the sharing of powers and the distribution of competencies between the different levels of administration, including the educational establishment (Barroso, 1996, p. 186).

The concept of constructed autonomy serves as a counterpoint to decreed autonomy and should not be conflated with a simplistic idea of "absolute freedom" or with the absence of limits and rules in the construction of decision-making processes, because "[...] identifying freedom with the absence of conditions, of limits, leads to the risk of a mistake – freedom is something that is experienced **in a situation** and there is no situation in which there are no limits" (Rios, 1995, p. 15, author's emphasis). From this, it follows, in an equivalent way, that autonomy is also something that always occurs *in relation*. Autonomy requires the existence of another, so it makes no sense to think of it as the independence to do what one wants: "[...] we complain about our dependence, about the subordination of our actions to externally determined purposes, about heteronomy. What we have, however, in the collective of the polis, is a situation of interdependence. [Therefore] autonomy does not mean solitude" (Rios, 1995 p. 16).

Autonomy as a principle of democratic administration represents the collective, and individual, construction for the building of social relations between equals:

> [...] autonomy [...] leads directly to the political and social problem. [...] we cannot desire autonomy without desiring it for everyone and that its achievement can only be fully conceived as a collective undertaking. [...] autonomy is only conceivable as a problem and a social relationship (Castoriadis, 1995, pp. 129-130).

The power of intervention and change grows when participation involves autonomous people (Castoriadis, 1995), which can conflict with government interests. Thus, autonomy as a democratic condition carries significant revolutionary potential: "[...] this is why those who say they want autonomy while refusing the revolution of institutions know neither what they are saying nor what they want" (Castoriadis, 1995, p. 132, notes).

The school, as a bureaucratic institution, carries with it traditions of its organization and administration. Located in a specific space – permeated by daily power relations, strict time controls, and equipped with its forms of administration, planning, and decision-making – the school develops alternatives for solving problems. This can also be called autonomy. Thus, the school is an institution that autonomously generates and reproduces cultural patterns, without fully understanding the limits of its potential. In other words, the school is more autonomous than one might imagine. It is not only from a lack of awareness regarding its autonomy and identity, since "[...] the notion of autonomy presupposes the need to know what we are. [...] This notion is political, [...] it is all the more political because it is associated, furthermore, with a reality of power" (Almino, 1985, p. 43). It is not that the school, or rather, the people at the school do not know it, but they demonstrate that they do not understand the extent of the power they have as a group in defining administration methods and procedures, in the design and implementation of a DA model.

Autonomy, as a condition for democracy, is more than a component for the equal participation of people. In school and education, it is also associated with the educational mission: "[...] the autonomy of the school is something that is placed about the freedom to formulate and execute an educational project" (Azanha, 1987, p. 143). This perspective allows us to view autonomy not only as a administration principle but also as a pedagogical horizon. In both cases, it is associated with the promotion of democracy for the implementation of DA and the development of a democratic education

project.

Every educational project presupposes a communicative action. To educate is to communicate. Dialogue is a privileged and democratic form of communication. However, we are not born knowing how to do it, and often we are not trained for dialogue, which makes the exercise of democracy even more difficult:

> The difficulty lies in the very creation of a new attitude – and at the same time so old – that of dialogue, which, however, we lacked in the type of training we had [...]. A dialogical attitude to which coordinators [and teachers, and principals, and other subjects in the school] must convert so that they truly educate and not 'domesticate' (Freire, 1967, 114).

The curious thing is that school is an institution that only works well with effective communication, however, it finds it difficult to dialogue. For education to practice freedom, it would need to

> [...] enable man to courageously discuss his problems. His insertion in these problems. That would warn him of the dangers of his time, so that, aware of them, he would gain the strength and courage to fight, instead of being led and dragged to the perdition of his own 'self', subjected to the prescriptions of others. Education that would place him in constant dialogue with the other (Freire, 1967, p. 90).

Therefore, if education and freedom are compatible through dialogue, it is relevant to answer:

> what is dialogue? It is a horizontal relationship between A and B. It arises from a critical matrix and generates criticality [...]. It is nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust. Therefore, only dialogue communicates (Freire, 1967, p. 117).

Dialogue, however, is more than an act of communication. It requires the attention of others to find reason in the other person's reason. Therefore, it is a process of alterity. It follows that consensus is not the starting point, but the objective of dialogue – which is not always possible. To deal with possible obstacles to achieving efficient communication, democratic procedures will prove useful. Dialogue, as a constituent of the principle of democratic administration, demands that people in school education be willing to argue, but, more importantly, that they be willing to truly listen.

All of these elements are crucial to understanding the principle of democratic administration of public education. Its implementation, or the conversion of this principle into the daily practice of educational and school administration, requires creativity, boldness, and commitment to avoid the possibility of democracy becoming merely a formality. The democratic mechanisms developed and implemented in schools and other education systems must achieve the goals of providing participation in the most collective way possible, with transparency, respect for diversity and autonomy, and encouraging dialogue because such mechanisms are not the reason for democracy. They are its constituent or characteristic elements. An election does not have an end in itself. Voting is not merely a fulfillment of duty or a means to secure the right to participate. It is a crucial avenue for presenting diverse and often contradictory ideas, guaranteeing the right to choose – elements that are very important to democracy.

DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION IN BRAZILIAN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Brazilian education legislation requires at least two instruments for DA at schools: the guarantee of participation from education professionals in the development of the school's political-pedagogical project (PPP), and the establishment of school councils that guarantee the participation of the school and local communities. These are the minimum requirements outlined by national legislation, and nothing prevents them. The law encourages municipal and state education systems to create their regulations for democratic administration, which may go beyond the boundaries of school administration, which is the limit set by the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB-*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação*) in its article 14 for the fulfillment of these minimum requirements (Brazil, 1996).

Regarding the participation of education professionals in the preparation of the school's PPP, the requirement for this procedure is based on the idea that every public basic education school must be structured based on a plan, an institutional project that addresses its principles, guidelines, goals, strategies, among other aspects. Therefore, the school or education network defines them as necessary.

The LDB (Brazil, 1996) posits that the democratic aspect of this process lies in the involvement of the staff working at the school. Notably, this group does not encompass students' families or the broader community, nor is it limited solely to the teaching personnel. The legislation recognizes a range of education professionals—those who constitute the staff at the school, whether as teachers or in other capacities—while deliberately excluding the school's *users* from this framework. This approach results in a form of partial democracy. However, it is important to note that this does not preclude educational networks and systems from broadening access to participation, thereby including school and community segments that are overlooked by federal law.

According to data from the Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb-*Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica*) from 2021, 98.2% of public schools reported the existence of PPPs, with over 99% confirming that teachers participate/participated in their development. However, the questionnaire did not ask whether other school professionals participated or not. When it comes to the involvement of parents or family members, 85% of schools indicated their participation. Given that these figures are based on self-reported data from school principals, it is possible that the reality may not be as extensive as suggested (INEP, 2021). However, principals must know that the existence of a PPP is important and that teachers must be part of its development.

The second device is most highlighted in the literature as a democratic resource. It is the school council, on which representatives of teachers, students, other school staff, including management and coordination teams, as well as representatives of the community must have a seat. The legislator's idea was based on the recognition that it was necessary to have a collegiate body that would serve as a space for the confluence of the demands and claims of the people who make up these groups, but which, at the same time, would be a representative space for discussion, study, deliberation, monitoring, evaluation and social control.

Thus, the school board is a tool of representative democracy (Bobbio, 2014). Its members do not have a delegated mandate and are therefore fiduciaries of their segments (Bobbio, 1993) and of the entire community in the administration of the school since it is not possible to bring everyone

together frequently to discuss and make decisions of common interest. The board members come from specific segments to ensure that the different views and perspectives on the school's activities are considered. They are not representatives who have to speak out to defend the position of their representatives, but rather the interests of the school beyond those restricted to their segment.

More than 90% of public schools in Brazil participating in the SAEB reported having an active school board and holding at least one meeting in 2021. Almost half of these schools hold board meetings at least once every two school months, and almost three-quarters of them hold meetings at least three times a year. However, the SAEB questionnaire did not ask who participates in the school board, so there is no updated information on compliance with the LDB provision (INEP, 2021)[2].

Table 1 – Percentage of public basic education schools that have a school council and the frequency of meetings: Brazil, Saeb 2021

Temporality	%
At least bimonthly	43.6
Quarterly	17.3
Every four months	13.4
Biannual	11.9
Annual	4.8
Without school council	9.1

Source: Inep. Microdados Saeb, 2021.
Data worked by the author.

The specialized literature on DA in education (Paro, 2003; Dourado, 2011; Amaral, 2019; Santos; Prado, 2017; Girardi; Cabral Neto, 2021; Oliveira; Silva, 2021; among others) along with teachers' unions, also associate this concept with other resources. One of the most obvious is the election of school principals. This is an unusual resource in other countries, and it sounds strange when Brazilians have the chance to report how school principals are chosen in our country. In any case, the articulation between this procedure and DA has been long-standing, to the point that they are even confused, or even that this type of management is reduced to the way of choosing principals, so the legislator gave significant importance to this procedure that addressed part of Goal 19 of the National Education Plan (PNE-*Plano Nacional de Educação*) to address the issue (Brasil, 2014).

The underlying idea here is that to democratize the administration of education and schools, people who work or study in schools must be able to express their opinions on who should lead them (Souza, 2007). This interpretation is not entirely wrong. The expression of people who work in or in schools regarding the choice of the principal carries a democratic component. However, this essentially depends on how we understand the nature and specificity of the role of the school principal.

This is a public "function" and not a public "position" (Souza, 2007; Scalabrin, 2018). Of

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[2] The 2023 questionnaire contains a question that seeks this information. However, the data was not available at the time of writing this article.

course, in those places where such a position comes from a public examination of tests and qualifications – considering the autonomy of the federated entity in deciding to do so – it will then be a "public position", but this is an exception. In practice, and the vast majority of networks and education systems of public basic education schools, principals temporarily occupy this position – their position is usually that of teacher, educator, pedagogue, etc. –, since school administration is a function (teaching) to be performed for a given time by this education professional. Whether the question is about position or function is not semantic or of minor importance, since the entire understanding of the application of Article 37 of the Federal Constitution depends on it (Brazil, 1988). Therefore, this issue will be addressed again later.

The nature of the work of school principals characterizes it as a political-pedagogical function (Souza, 2009b; Souza, 2012). Political because their work is often interspersed on the same day by disputes and power relations. Dealing with these conflicts places the principal at the epicenter of decisions that are often controversial or conflicting, in the sense that those who do not benefit from the decision made eventually consider the result to be unfair.

There are several other issues, such as those of a technical nature, for example, which will naturally be decided technically. Among these, there are issues of a pedagogical nature. This gives rise to another characteristic of the role of a school leader, namely, that he or she is not just any leader, but someone who leads the management process of an institution that has a very specialized social function: the pedagogical function. Therefore, the person who has the task of leading this institution, in doing so, dominates – or should dominate – pedagogy, since among the conflicts mentioned, although of different types, the most important are those that affect the pedagogical process.

The election of a school principal is a democratic procedure to the extent that the principal is considered a person whose work has a political-pedagogical characteristic. On the other hand, if the nature of her work is considered predominantly technical – administrative or pedagogical –, a public selection process based on tests and qualifications seems to be the best way to fill the position of principal.

The positive characteristics expected of a school principal, as everything seems to indicate, are usually: the ability to dialogue; to listen; to have a sense of justice; to exercise recognition; to coordinate groups; to mobilize the team of professionals; to encourage students; to interact with the school community; to negotiate and interact with community and political leaders and with administrators of the education system, among many others. In addition, to being an excellent education professional with knowledge of the educational process (Souza; Gouveia, 2010). This last characteristic is technical. The others can be understood as political domains. Based on this, one question to ask is: how can we know if an education professional who wants to be a school principal has the necessary characteristics without asking the school community? Therefore, the election presents a resource for listening to the community to verify which person best meets the expected requirements. The characteristic that was mentioned last, in theory, has already been verified through a public competition that the teacher took and passed, providing evidence of pedagogical mastery – although it is always possible to question the quality of public competitions held.

It is true that, on the other hand, if the characteristics that are predominantly expected of the principal are those of a technical nature – administrative or pedagogical – then, in fact, the public selection

process will be enough to handle the task of selecting the person for the position. The understanding of the Federal Supreme Court (STF), given the various Direct Actions of Unconstitutionality (Adin) of state and municipal laws on the election of principals, is that the aforementioned article 37 of the Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988) prohibits this type of election. This is because, according to the aforementioned article, the filling of a public office must be done through a public selection process, admitting that, if the office or position is "trusted" by the government (municipal, state, or federal), the government may freely appoint the person for the position. In other words, the STF allows public selection processes and political appointments for the selection of principals but does not allow elections. It is understood that this is a public office, but it is not. The evidence strongly indicates that, in practice, it is a public function, for which there would be no problem if the choice were based on an election. The solution, however, has been occurring in another way, namely, in the text of the federal law itself, as is the case of Law No. 13,005/2014 (Brazil, 2014), the PNE Law, as in others, in which the expression "public consultation" is used instead of election, because at the end of the consultation process, the government may or may not accept the choice indicated by the consulted community.

In any case, the question here is to what extent elections, or consultations, can be considered a tool for democratic administration. Paro (2003) points out that elections are uncertain. They are not a guarantee. They are a resource that allows for debate and participation, while also encouraging dialogue. Whether or not elections in schools can address these issues is something that research has not yet sufficiently answered, but elections potentially contribute to these ends.

However, less than a quarter of public schools in the country had their principals elected with community participation, according to data from the 2019 School Census (Brazil, 2019)[3]. The predominant form is precisely the one that the PNE does not endorse, that is, nomination, which reaches more than 63% of school principals, leaving them in the hands of municipal and state governments who ultimately hold the power to remove or keep them in office.

Table 2 – Percentage of methods used to select principals of public basic education schools: Brazil, 2019 School Census

Form of choice	%
Nomination	55,7
Selection + Nomination	8,2
Contest	7,2
Election	18,5
Selection + Election	5,9
Other forms	4,5

source: Inep. Censo Escolar, 2019.
Data worked by the author.

In addition to these procedures, on a smaller scale, there are schools and education networks

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[3] Unfortunately, Inep decided to stop collecting this data in the Saeb questionnaire, transferring the question to the School Census, whose most up-to-date microdata were not available at the time of writing.

that use other mechanisms to expand participation and democracy. The student union, legally recognized by Federal Law 7,398/1985 (Brazil, 1985), is one of these instruments. The legislation does not dwell on it but simply recognizes and authorizes it. Almost three decades later, the PNE Law also returned to address the issue in its strategy 19.4, speaking of

> [...] encourage the creation and strengthening of student unions and parents' associations in all basic education networks, ensuring that they have adequate spaces and operating conditions in schools and encouraging their organic articulation with school councils, through their respective representations (Brazil, 2014).

The argument is that students should have the right to organize and demonstrate, both to be able to participate in community decision-making processes and to educate themselves for democracy through their organization. However, data from Saeb 2021 show that the vast majority of elementary and high schools do not have a student union or that it is inactive. Just over a fifth of schools have a student union (INEP, 2021).

Table 3 – Percentage of public basic education schools concerning the existence of Student Unions: Brazil, Saeb 2021

Student Union	%
Yes, it exists and is active.	21,9
Yes, it exists, but it is inactive.	15,8
There is no Student Union	62,3

Source: Inep. Microdados Saeb, 2021.
Data worked by the author.

Strategy 19.4 of the PNE Law (Brazil, 2014), cited above, also mentioned another potentially democratic resource: parent associations. They are usually called parent-teacher associations (APM-*associações de pais e mestres*), and not just parent associations. The nomenclature varies throughout Brazil, but they are usually private law institutions, with their registration with the Federal Revenue Service, and that function as auxiliary bodies of the school. Since the mid-1990s, their support function has been redefined and expanded, with the creation of the federal government's financial resource transfer program for schools: Direct Money in Schools Program – PDDE (*Programa Dinheiro Direto na Escola)* (Souza, 2001; Viana, 2020). Effectively, APMs are spaces for free association of the school community, therefore, they carry a democratic seed in the sense of serving as an organizational space for demands and support for the school's institutional collective work – whether pedagogical or not. However, in practice, and considering the reports of the (few) studies on the subject, they continue to operate more as accounting departments or as fundraising departments for schools than as democratizing instruments for school (financial) administration.

Strangely enough, their existence does not reach all schools. The Ministry of Education (MEC), through the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE-*Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação*), transfers resources directly to these associations, and within this program, they are referred to as "executing units" (UEx). Therefore, all public schools have – or should have – an

interest in having and keeping their UEx active. However, more than 37% of public schools reported not having an APM. They may use other forms of UEx, such as the "school fund", for example, since the FNDE legislation allows this.

Table 4 – Percentage of public basic education schools about the existence and operation of APM: Brazil, Saeb 2021

Temporality of APM meetings	%
At least bimonthly	23,7
Quarterly	10,7
Every four months	11,1
Biannual	11,4
Annual	5,4
Without APM	37,7

Source: Inep. Microdados Saeb, 2021.
Data worked by the author.

There are also other resources and procedures for democratic administration in schools, such as local education conferences, assemblies, and school congresses, which, unlike the others, are instruments of participatory democracy. The idea behind these resources is to provide opportunities for discussions and decision-making in which each person – teacher, student, family member, non-teaching staff member, community member – can participate by offering their ideas, suggestions, or criticisms.

These are not common practices in schools. Nor is there any mention of this in the survey questionnaires conducted by the MEC. Therefore, the ministry does not work with the hypothesis that practices like these are quantitatively significant. However, there are local experiences predominantly conducted by the initiative of the people at the school, who understand the need to provide broader opportunities for dialogue with the community, to evaluate the collective work of the institution and, at the same time, propose directions and alternatives for the future.

These resources all refer to the democratization of school administration. The PNE, however, expanded the understanding of DA by extending it to the administration of education systems, indicating municipal, state, district, and national education conferences, also including forums, in the same instances as the conferences, in addition to historical collective mechanisms, such as education councils, also in the same dimensions. In any case, the perspective brought by the PNE represents some progress in the procedural direction of democratic administration because it holds federated entities responsible for organizing these public spheres. It also suggests the need to overcome the understanding of DA as an exclusive principle for the administration of public schools, including the need to democratize the administration of education systems, involving the participation of society, via conferences, and of representative institutions, via forums. As for education councils, the CNE has

> [...] normative, deliberative and advisory power to the Minister of State for Education, in the performance of the functions and attributions of the federal public power in matters of education, being responsible for formulating and evaluating the national education policy, ensuring the quality of teaching, ensuring compliance with educational legislation and ensuring

the participation of society in the improvement of Brazilian education (CNE, [s./d.]).

Their equivalents, that is, the councils of the states and the Federal District, do the same in their regional jurisdictions. However, municipal councils – whose existence is not mandatory by law, fulfilling this requirement only in those municipalities that decide to establish their education system – sometimes do not have very broad powers, especially in places where there is no established municipal system, despite their existence. The problem is that they are not, with a few exceptions, democratically composed of representatives of segments and institutions that express the plurality that constitutes the educational organization, considering, among other things, the illegitimate acts provoked by President Michel Temer when he revoked the appointment of councilors, who represented popular educational segments, who had been appointed by President Dilma Rousseff (Tokarnia, 2016, [s./p.]). Unfortunately, situations like this are more common in the composition of councils than many suppose. Therefore, even though they are important collective education management bodies, it is not possible to ensure whether they compete for or against the democratization of educational administration in the country and in other subnational entities.

There are also specific experiments that have been carried out to democratize the administration of education systems, such as the participatory budget for education, in the management of municipal financial resources, when the population was invited to participate in a broad discussion on investments and priorities for educational spending. This experiment was linked to the participatory budgets that were created in the 1970s in some Brazilian municipalities (initially in Boa Esperança-ES; Piracicaba-SP; Lages-SC), and which were expanded by the democratic-popular governments led by the Workers' Party in the following decade. The idea is to allow the inclusion and participation of ordinary citizens in the budget debate since the democratization of public management involves the democratization of decisions regarding what is most operational in the management of public money in a city or state.

These resources for expanding democracy in education administration come up against the need to build a culture of participation. As we have seen, there is no democracy without participation. But people do not feel the need, nor do they demand to participate in decisions linked to the collective. The lack of understanding of the importance and need for participation puts the effectiveness of the aforementioned procedures in check. In the 1980s, Brazil experienced what the literature would call a "participationist" wave (Sanchéz, 2002) since the presence of the population in public spheres and instances was more than a technical necessity of democratization, but a political objective and banner.

The feeling of needing to participate is not innate. But it is constructed. Democracy, in this sense, is a social construction derived from the recognition of the need to deal communally with the interests of the community and the recognition of the right of everyone to participate in this process (Bobbio, 2014). Democracy in schools is more than a principle or procedural resource. It composes educational objectives, carrying out, in its attributions, the formation and preparation for the world and life through socialization, coexistence, and knowledge. Therefore, consequently, the formation of democracy, participation, dialogue, and otherness, as listed in its purposes (Bobbio, 1990).

Democracy in school administration seems to induce more democracy (Souza, 2007). When

a school has a principal elected with the participation of the community, for example, there will also be an active school council and a participatory PPP. Furthermore, this characteristic even favors a more positive perception by teachers regarding the climate of collaboration and dialogue with the school principal and the administration team (Souza, 2019). Therefore, democracy seems to be pedagogical: democratic administration encourages the creation of more democratic spaces and procedures.

Democratic practice, in addition to being crucial for the implementation of the DA principle, also educates people, teaching them democratic coexistence, acceptance of others, and the non-violent resolution of conflicts and disagreements (Bobbio, 1945a; Bobbio, 1945b). In short, it educates them to solve problems through dialogue and otherness, making them understand the collective nature of the phenomena of school and education.

The generation that lived in elementary school during the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil received little (or no) education in democracy. Perhaps that is why they do not miss it and perhaps also why they find it difficult to engage in dialogue and try to resolve conflicts in a democratic and participatory manner. This does not mean that we can only experience democracy when we are theoretically and conceptually prepared for it. Democracy is built in practice and democratic education is built precisely through it. More important than the declarations in favor of democracy in the guiding documents of educational and school administration is its implementation. More important than the ideal declared in speeches is the practical translation of these ideals into everyday life. More important than the mechanisms established for this practice is the development of a democratic culture in each person involved in the educational process.

REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION

The foundation of exploring the relationships between politics, power, and democracy in the administration of schools and public education lies in understanding educational administration as a fundamentally political-pedagogical phenomenon (Souza, 2012). This phenomenon unfolds in a place of disputes and domination (Weber, 2004), which is why the role of the school leader is inherently political-pedagogical.

The administration of education and schools involves the administration of demands and conceptions, conflicts, and power relations. This is because of the diverse ideological, political, cultural, and sometimes social and economic backgrounds of those who contribute to school education. These people legitimately fight to guide or conduct the actions of educational or school policy in the direction they believe to be most correct, appropriate, or convenient. It is a legitimate fight because there is no optimal way to make political decisions, that is, the choices of political alternatives, and even their very existence, arise from that diversity and plurality mentioned. This issue is related to the understanding of the political nature of school administration. In schools, or the education system, politics represents operating the dispute with (groups of) opposing people (to some extent) with different educational understandings and conceptions in the search for control over the destinies of schools and education. This context brings the concept of power closer to an objective dispute where the result is the prevalence (or victory) of one position over another. However,

> [...] if politics in schools recognizes that the power in question arises from an [agreement] signed between the people who make up this institution, and considers that dialogue between these subjects is a precondition for its operation, then there will be perhaps more democratic political action. But in either case, it is always about power, because politics only exists where there is power in question. How it is dealt with, however, can demonstrate a more or less democratic vocation (Souza, 2009a, p. 124).

Democracy does not simply manifest in the existence of power struggles, but on the way we deal with them. One example is the majority rule – the primary procedural element for democracy (Bobbio, 1984; 2000; 2017) –, which can eventually represent an undemocratic resource. When school institutions tasked with fostering dialogue, humanization, and emancipation (Adorno, 1998), conduct their collective decision-making processes based on the logic of the majority, they risk the limits of the use of the rule, undermining their formative objectives. Furthermore, the majority criterion may even generate procedures more consistent with violence than with democracy. As the majority becomes increasingly aware of the control over decisions, it may neglect the educational role of democracy, tending not to want dialogue, even with weak arguments, since it has the "main argument": the legitimacy and strength of being the majority. Therefore, if the individuals who make up these institutions do not base their actions on dialogue and otherness, with an understanding of power relations, these collective actions will be undemocratic.

Democratic administration is a process and not an action, since educational and school administration is a daily process and involves several moments in which power relations are in dispute, such as the definition of an agenda or problem that demands the attention of the collective in discussion and deliberation. After all, in a collective instance, the one who has the power to call for debate has a strong power to define what is discussed and what is not discussed. The democratization of administration implies the expansion of the possibilities for the subjects of the collective to intervene in the definition of the agenda.

After identifying problems/issues, the administration process involves discussion, deliberation, and planning. Or debate, decision-makin,g and organization for action. These are the moments that DM scholars usually focus on, as this is when the dispute over interests becomes objective when alternatives are presented and decisions are made about them. In fact, a willingness to dialogue and to accept otherness is essential, especially here.

From these decisions, monitoring of referrals and evaluation are the next and final phases of the administration process cycle. In these stages, participation continues to be very important, since the opportunity to compare the results of actions with discussions and decisions made previously is more than just a technical task for administrators: it is called social control. This cycle begins again precisely from this last stage since evaluation allows for the review and raising of new issues, which generate new discussions, deliberations ,and planning.

What characterizes this process as a democratic cycle is not only the involvement of individuals in each phase but also the nature of that participation and the conditions that facilitate it. It is crucial to acknowledge the distinct roles that various stakeholders occupy within the realm of school education—teachers, students, community members, school principals, coordinators, staff, system

leaders, and families all have specific responsibilities. Consequently, when considering participation in the administration of education and schools, we must reflect on several key questions: Who are the participants? What backgrounds do they come from? What responsibilities do they hold concerning the educational process? These inquiries relate to the concept of "specificity of functions" or "roles," referring to the duties carried out by individuals engaged in democratic administration. The diverse perspectives and insights of these stakeholders are invaluable in fostering the development and provision of alternatives for democratic decision-making.

Dialogue, as we have seen, and otherness are elements that guarantee that such diversity can manifest itself and be practiced. Without them, decisions made in the office end up being merely endorsed or made official by people in spaces that should be for discussion and deliberation.

The execution of this democratic cycle follows a set of rules and procedures to ensure the most balanced and fair functioning of the democratic system. These rules govern who can speak, when arguments can be presented, in what form and for how long they can occur, how discussions and decision-making are processed, and which rules and decisions become validated and accepted. The development of this system depends on the participatory involvement of people, but also on knowledge and information, both for the technical development of the rules and for qualifying participation throughout the process. Without rules, democracy cannot survive (Bobbio, 2000).

In short, these elements allowed, some time ago, the definition of democratic administration as

> [...] a political process in which people who work in/on the school identify problems, discuss, deliberate plan, forward, monitor, control, and evaluate the set of actions aimed at the development of the school itself in the search for solutions to those problems. This process, sustained by dialogue, alterit,y and recognition of the technical specificities of the various functions present in the school, is based on the effective participation of all segments of the school community, respect for collectively constructed norms for decision-making processes, and the guarantee of broad access to information for the school's subjects (Souza, 2009a, p. 125-126).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After the reflections and uses of this concept in field research (Souza; Pires, 2018; Silva; Santos, 2019; Finatti, 2021; Perboni; Oliveira, 2021; Schane et al, 2022; Batista, 2022; Barbosa, 2022; among others) that derive from the accumulation of studies on the democratic administration of education, provoked by the arguments and insights of Norberto Bobbio, it is necessary to add some elements.

The first one is related to pedagogy. We have seen that the nature of school administration is a mix between politics and pedagogy and that this derives from the fact that we are not managing an institution or organization but with education and the school. Therefore, we are talking about an institution with an essential social function. Thus, the incorporation of pedagogical principles into the political process of school/educational administration is decisive.

The second aspect to consider is the concept of collectivity. Although the original concept mentions "people," there is no indication that it is more than a group of individuals. Bobbio (1983; 2000)

warned us that the group does not make a decision. It is the person who decides. It is the people, each one of them, who are the subjects of the decisions, even though the nature of the school demands the understanding that collective work is one of its main characteristics. Therefore, it is a plural political-pedagogical process.

A third topic is transparency. Little is said about this, which could eventually lead one to believe that this characteristic is subsumed by participation and dialogue. While both are associated with transparency, it is worth emphasizing the need for the processes of conducting school and educational policy to be as transparent as possible, since this guarantees people's trust in the system.

Lastly, a fourth new element is related to the goals and purposes of democracy. One of the reasons for the democratization of school and education administration is the contribution to democratic development, aiming to cultivate citizens who understand and fight for their rights to participate and intervene in the public sphere. This is also done through democratic practice. Therefore, if administration has the task of solving the small and large problems of daily life and the functioning of school education, it also has the objective of building a democratic culture in society.

Thus, it is necessary to rewrite the concept of democratic administration as a collective political-pedagogical process. People who work in/on the school/education identify problems, discuss, deliberate, plan, direct, monitor, control, and evaluate the set of actions aimed at the development of the school/education, in the search for solutions to these problems and the construction of a democratic culture. This process – supported by dialogue, otherness, transparency, and recognition of the specificities of the various functions resulting from the positions occupied by people in administration – is based on the effective participation of all segments of the school/educational community, and respect for the collectively constructed norms for the administration and decision-making processes, to, from this basis, guarantee broad access to information for the subjects involved.

Finally, the administration of schools and public education can be understood as a democratic process, in which democracy is taken as a principle since schools are financed and demanded by public resources. As a method, it is worth highlighting that it must be implemented so that it affects the organization and functioning of education since defending democracy requires creating effective possibilities for its realization.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with this article.