

3Cs: Building a methodology to strengthen democratic school management

ARTICLE

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1

Abstract

The objective of this work is to propose an intervention project, which focuses on training school counselors, seeking to strengthen democratic school management through effective participation. With the management of public education assuming a democratic nature, participation has become an essential element for its implementation, capable of promoting co-responsibility between school management and the community. Given this, the question arises: How can we build a methodology to implement with the school council (SC) the effective participation of counselors in decisions, strengthening the principles of democratic management? Starting the debate with the conceptualization of the SC and participation as a mechanism for democratic school management, based on the competencies and attributions provided for in legal instruments and existing theories on the subject. Therefore, this intervention project aims to contribute to consolidating awareness regarding the understanding of what participation means for greater efficiency in the SC's actions.

Keywords: Management. School board. Participation.

3Cs: A construção de uma metodologia de fortalecimento da gestão democrática escolar

Resumo

O objetivo deste trabalho é propor um projeto de intervenção focado na capacitação de conselheiros escolares, buscando fortalecer a gestão democrática escolar pela efetiva participação. Com a gestão do ensino público assumindo uma natureza democrática, a participação tornou-se elemento indispensável à sua implementação, capaz de promover uma co-responsabilização da gestão escolar com a comunidade. Diante disso, questiona-se: como construir uma metodologia para implementar junto ao conselho escolar (CE) a efetiva participação dos conselheiros nas decisões, fortalecendo os princípios da gestão democrática? Iniciando o debate pela conceituação do CE e pela participação como mecanismo de gestão democrática escolar, com base nas competências e atribuições previstas nos instrumentos legais e nas teorias existentes sobre a temática. Com isso, este projeto de intervenção tem o intuito de contribuir para consolidar uma consciência a respeito do entendimento do que é a participação para maior eficiência das ações do CE.

Palavras-chave: Gestão. Conselho escolar. Participação.

1 Introduction

2

It is a mission and a challenge for school administrators to efficiently make the necessary moves to ensure the participation of the school community, through its representatives, in school management decisions. This makes it essential to carry out research and practices aimed at identifying ways of organizing the actions of the school council (SC), so that a quality education based on the principles of democratic management is offered.

As Libâneo (2001) states, school organization is seen as an objective, neutral, technical reality that functions rationally; therefore, it can be planned, organized and controlled in order to achieve higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency. Among the issues involving effectiveness and efficiency in the school administrative process, this intervention project sets out to answer the following question: how can we build a methodology to implement effective participation by the school council (SC) in decisions, strengthening the principles of democratic management?

The theme addressed in this work is relevant today, as it is present in many of the research discourses on democratic management in education. In the words of Cury (2004), there are not a few books that, as a product of essays, research or even academic production, have looked into the subject.

It is considered that democratic management mechanisms, such as SCs, are instruments that make it possible for different segments of society to participate in decision-making. Since democracy is a process that prescribes alternatives for composition and consensus between different, or even divergent, interests, as Souza (2019) states. It should be recognized that, in the context of school management, there is the political challenge of articulating and building a good debate with the various forces of power that are at play within the school and in the relationship with the participating community.

Given this scenario, it is essential to deepen our understanding of the SC and participation as mechanisms for democratic management in the field of education, based on the competencies and attributions provided for in the legal instruments: The 1988

Federal Constitution (CF/88), the 2014/2024 National Education Policy (PNE) and the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB).

With regard to the work of council members, we have seen a great deal of effective mobilization of the councils. In the words of Paz (2005), the debate on councils has to start with the aggregation of information, given the lack of knowledge about both their existence and the ways in which they operate. A common argument among those against councils is "that the population doesn't know how to participate, so they can't discuss budget issues" (Paz, 2005, p. 22).

In addition, there is a social challenge to implement quality public policies in education. For this reason, reforms are necessary and, in order to implement these reforms, we must have well-prepared councillors who are able to promote participation in the decision-making process, so that the existence of the SC does not become just another bureaucratic document, unrelated to the context in which the school finds itself.

With this in mind, the aim of this article is to propose the construction of an intervention project to train councillors, with a view to strengthening democratic school management through effective participation.

According to Sivestrini (2006), the SC was formally established to ensure that the community participates in decision-making processes. However, one of the problems faced by collective bodies such as the SC is the ineffective participation of its members. In the words of Silvestrini (2006, p. 74), "this process cannot be based on appearances, because this way the fruit is the disqualification of the action of participation (pseudo-participation) and, consequently, the demobilization of the agents".

In order to address the problematic issue of this work, this intervention project will be based on training the councilors of the TEST teaching unit, with a workload of 4 hours per meeting, totaling 20 hours, divided into 5 meetings, 2 of which will be face-to-face and 3 synchronous (via Teams), to be held according to a schedule to be defined.

Each intervention is made up of a set of actions that must be carried out during the execution of the project. These interventions consume various types of resources. For this proposal, the resources required are:

Economic resources - physical area, computer and printer equipment, provision of various stationery materials necessary for the educational process.

Cognitive resources - trainers in the process, advocates for educational causes and members of education councils.

Political or power resources - support from parents and students, support from community organizations and the education department.

Organizational resources - the organization chart, timetables, disciplinary rules and professional exercises.

In order to manage the actions of the intervention proposal for the counselors, the methodological structure of the intervention project, called the 3Cs, is based on the actions of 'communicating' and 'capacitating' the counselors, with a view to 'collaboration' in decision-making. It should be noted that the school management team is responsible for managing the actions, indicating the necessary course corrections during the execution of each action. The study is divided into three specific objectives:

- To analyze the SC as a channel for participation that brings together people from the school community in practices that concern management;
- To highlight the possibilities for greater participation by councillors in school management;
- Describe the 3Cs method as a strategy for training councillors to strengthen democratic school management.

All with a focus on encouraging democratic school management and more democratic educators, which, according to Silva (2023), are essential for improving the quality of education, but it is a difficult process to implement and maintain.

2 Methodology

The study was based on bibliographic research carried out in SciELO, CAPES, Google Scholar and Public Library databases, with the aim of locating theses, dissertations and articles that corroborated the terms searched for in this study.

In order to draw up this intervention proposal, we opted for qualitative research, a type of study based on answering questions in a subjective way, which often cannot be quantified. This approach is based on detailed descriptions of phenomena and behaviors, through direct quotes from people about their experiences, excerpts from documents, records, correspondence, among others.

According to Duarte (2001), in their investigations, it is up to the researchers to make explicit the rules and theoretical-methodological assumptions that guide their work, in order to broaden the debate about the necessary definition of criteria for assessing the reliability of scientific research that uses this resource. In this way, this type of research seeks to approach the data with greater precision, detail and depth, thus achieving the expected result of reliability.

We will do this by first focusing on communication with board members, reflecting on the role of the internet and the use of apps such as WhatsApp, Teams, Google Meet, among others, which can facilitate the exchange of information about meetings and training, seeking a more directive and efficient management.

The next step is the training sessions, organizing the logistics for the councillors' training meetings. Finally, we will evaluate the process and discuss the importance of this training so that council members can collaborate effectively with school management, improving their understanding of regulations and participation processes in decision-making.

This training will be carried out in a teaching unit located in the north of the state of Espírito Santo, called the Test School, with a workload of 4 hours per meeting, totaling 20 hours, divided into 5 meetings: 2 face-to-face and 3 synchronous (via Teams), to be held according to the schedule below:

Table 1- 3Cs project implementation schedule.

Planning	Mar/2024 to Dec/2024
Training	Jun/Nov/24

Training 1- Identifying the roles of board members.	Jun/24
Training 2 - Using social interaction technologies: WhatsApp groups, Teams and GoogleMeet.	Aug/24
Training 3 - Checklist for transferring resources to the school.	Sep/24
Training 4 - Application of resources.	Oct/24
Training 5 - Checklist for the use of resources.	Nov/24
Monitoring participation	Apr/Dec/24
Evaluation of the intervention project	Dec

Source: Authors

Participation will be monitored by checking attendance in the minutes of each training meeting and by calling the SC.

It is hoped that all this knowledge and information that will be passed on to the councilors will contribute to effectiveness and efficiency in the process of collaborating in decision-making, building debates and actions that meet the real needs of the school community.

In line with the premise that the council is also the place where deliberation takes place, it is important to point out that, in the words of Cury (2004), deliberation implies making a decision, preceded by analysis and debate, which in turn, as we have seen, implies publicizing the acts at the hearing and making them visible. Thus, in the relationship between the efficiency and effectiveness of the debates, training was the instrument for all the councillors to acquire a technical dimension to the decision-making processes in school management.

Given that the whole purpose of this proposal is to promote the training of school councillors in order to improve the quality of education, in the pursuit of equity and social inclusion, with a view to strengthening democratic management through effective participation.

3 Results and Discussion

It is true that the mere existence of the councils was already a significant step towards building school autonomy, but the democratic potential of the councils can only be verified in the course of their actual practices, in which this vocation may or may not be confirmed (Gohn, 2001, *apud* Souza, 2009).

Also, according to Souza (2009, p. 276), "[...] it is based on the idea that the participation of people in the management of public affairs is sufficient or technically efficient". In theory, this problem can be reduced if collective action extends beyond decision-making. Paro (1997) *apud* Silvestrini (2006, p. 38) shares this idea and states that it is not just a question of allowing participation, but of providing the conditions for real participation, which go beyond the merely material, and also involve the distribution of authority and the possibility of exerting social pressure.

In the scenario described above, the education system itself is becoming more complex and diversified, requiring the more conscious presence of its subjects and the people interested in it (Cury, 2004).

According to Perini (2007, p. 41):

Thinking about the democratic management of education implies giving relevance to the principles of decentralization and participation, which are basic to the implementation of a process responsible for guiding the destinies of the school institution, seeking social transformation.

As far as the SC is concerned, it is the school's highest representative body. In order to guarantee the participation of all those interested in the educational process, it is made up of all segments: principal, teacher representatives, administrative staff, parents, students and members of the community (Silva, 2023).

The School Council is a representative and equal collegiate body of the school. The advantage of having it in place is that it creates spaces for democratic learning. Thinking that autonomy and democracy are processes that are built with others, it is believed that the school can be conceived as an institution that allows democracy to be learned as a practice and not as a method. When we have a truly functioning SC, we allow the active participation of all those involved with the school: principals, teachers, coordinators, staff, parents and students, the local community; in its decision-making processes (Gomes; Luiz; Silva, 2017, p.120).

In order to make this concept of democratic management based on full participation a reality, according to Souza (2009), we should consider the school council as an instrument for materializing this principle, also in order to be consistent with the potentially democratic social reality that we are experiencing in contemporary national history.

Thinking that "[...] school councils are, in theory, the places where those who have no voice can be given a voice, that is, they are potential spaces for dialog, for communicative action" (Souza, 2009, p. 278). In other words, "issues related to participation form the backdrop to the processes of materializing the democratic management of public education" (Perini, 2007, p. 41). In the words of Gohn (2011), SCs should be channels of participation that bring together representatives of the population and members of the community in practices that concern school management.

In the words of Silvestrini (2006, p. 74-75):

Participation is the only way to ensure democratic management, based on autonomy. Through social participation comes the process of organization and management, which involves administrative procedures, appropriate ways of conceiving and carrying out actions in the face of the reality experienced, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and accountability. This process involves not only participation in management, but also management of the participation process itself, so that it is linked to the production of legitimate rights, a fundamental characteristic of social democracy.

Gohn (2011) highlights its possibilities in terms of expanding control over democratic management. In order to establish an active SC, it is necessary for the process of changing educational management (Silva, 2023).

Even though the principle of participation is almost as old as democracy itself, as Gohn (2011) states, in terms of the idea of participatory democratic school management, it must be said that it is recent. "(...) it was with the 1988 Federal Constitution, in the struggles that preceded it and in the debates that followed it, that the issue of democratic management gained visibility and strength on the national scene" (Ferreira, Corrochano and Leite, 2005, p. 174). Thus, it is understood that the SC, as a collegiate body that aims to democratize Brazilian public school management from the 1980s onwards, began its

implementation driven by the commitment of popular social organizations that sought to expand access to fundamental political and social rights, a movement that began after the end of the civil-military regime established in 1964 (Souza, 2019).

The deliberative school councils which, in the 1980s, represented the possibility of democratizing public schools, of reinventing the way of being and being in education based on bringing school and community closer together, are also suffering the consequences of the neoliberal policies of the 1990s, which act invisibly in standardizing psychosocial processes (Ferreira, Corrochano and Leite, 2005, p. 176).

According to Gohn (2011), the subject of participation has a long tradition of study and analysis, particularly in the field of political science. However, for this author, understanding what participation is remains an enigma to be deciphered. Gohn (2011, p. 16) describes "participation as one of the most used words in the political, scientific and popular vocabulary of modernity".

We can say that, from the 1988 Constitution to the approval of the PNE (2014-2024), the principle of democratic school management with community participation has been present in Brazilian education debates and legislation. However, even after being enshrined as a right, participation, according to Perini (2007), will only be guaranteed through its exercise.

It is true that, in the field of education, we continue to make progress in terms of legislation. As an example, according to Ferreira, Corrochano and Leite (2005), we can cite the debate that took place around the Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB) No. 9.394/96, which once again reaffirmed the democratic management of public education as one of the principles of education, as can be seen in Article 3. The LDB establishes the need for the school to coordinate with families and the community (art. 12, item V), and that education systems must define rules for democratic management, guaranteeing the participation of education professionals and the school community in the SC (art. 14) (Silvestrini, 2006, p. 19).

Bringing families, schools and the community closer together and dialoguing became the responsibility of educational establishments. "[...] the open and frank

conversation between individual and collective subjects in an institution aimed at training men and women is a precondition for the democratization of its management" (Souza, 2009, p. 278).

It is clear that, in Brazil today, there is a framework of laws and other regulations from the federal, state and municipal levels that regulate the management of school education. However, even with the legal apparatus that values and encourages democratization in school management, relations of force and control continue to exist, as Ferreira, Corrochano and Leite (2005) state. It is true to say that

The creation of these councils is not only linked to the democratic interests of management, but there is a technical interest (which is also political) in a considerable part of the educational reform procedures that encourage the creation of collective management bodies in schools, at least on the part of those proposing these reforms. This technical interest is linked to the idea that mechanisms of this nature could enable a kind of control over the school (Souza, 2009, p. 279).

However, the involvement of more than one person in decision-making generates commitment from everyone and co-responsibility for the results, whether positive or negative for the functioning of the school unit, as stated by Perini (2007).

But "[...] democracy, in order to become a culture, takes time, patience and insistence" (Souza, 2009, p. 287). Therefore, even though it exists in almost all public schools in the country, the school council, according to Perini (2007, p. 68), "is still an imperfect instrument and in order to contribute to the construction of collegiate management, truly articulated with popular interests, it needs to be improved and transformed". In order for this legal system, which ranges from curricular guidelines to funding and sources of resources, to be known by all education professionals committed to their pedagogical and political work, as Cury (2004) states, it is essential that knowledge of these normative constraints is not only the responsibility of those who carry out administrative functions.

Despite having adequate educational resources, the establishment of democratic administrative actions is still challenging, especially in the interrelationships between direct managers, teachers, students and families, since the implementation of a democratic administration in the school was not and is not an easy and quick process, coming up against several difficulties (Silva, 2023, p. 12).

In this way, it is worth thinking that the school community should reflect proactively on the actions to be developed by this collegiate body, especially since it is already aware that the actions of the SC generate the democratization of public schools, as Souza (2009) states. "As a constituent part of society, schools can contribute to fostering the learning of democratic, egalitarian and less exclusionary practices" (Souza, 2019, p. 27). The existence of these councils should not be for bureaucratic, cartorial bodies that stifle the dynamism of education professionals and administrators or the autonomy of the systems. Their front line, according to Cury (2004), is, within the relationship between State and Society, to be at the service of the greater aims of education and cooperate with the zeal for learning in Brazilian schools.

It is in the context of democratic school management, articulated with the interests of the school community, that the 3Cs (Communicate-Capacitate-Collaborate) project emerges. This project is a proposal for a strategy that can guide the behavior of a body of councillors towards effective and efficient democratic participation in SC decisions.

Since, in the words of Gohn (2006, p. 33):

Many school staff are members of school councils and collegiate bodies, but they usually exercise a pact of silence, not really participating and serving as passive role models for other sectors of the educational community that make up a collegiate body.

According to the author, they are only present to make up the minimum number of board members and quorum needed for the collegiate body, which means that there are no significant changes in terms of effective participation in the decision-making process. Since school councils, even though they have an advisory, deliberative and supervisory role, are limited to agreeing with the decisions of school principals, often due to a lack of knowledge about their inherent autonomy (Rocha; Basoni, 2015, *apud* Silva, 2023, p. 12).

Initially, as Gohn (2006) proposes, whatever methodological path is constructed or reconstructed, it is of the utmost importance to pay attention to the role of the mediating agents in the process. Often, as Libâneo (2001) states, school management has been

marked by a bureaucratic and functionalist conception, bringing school organization closer to business organization, which is often one-sided and undemocratic.

In some schools, according to Souza (2009), the people in charge may not foresee moments when councillors will be able to participate, often because they assume that they might upset the power structure present in the school. This shows that school management experiences all the contradictions that exist in this social and political context on a daily basis (Silvestrini, 2006).

As Ferreira, Corrochano and Leite (2005) state, when taking on school management, there is the political challenge of articulating and dialoguing the various power forces at play within the school and in the relationship with the community. From the perspective of these authors, this is not an easy task.

This is because, according to Souza (2009, p. 280):

[...] the pressure, usually from the education system, on the school leader is high in cases of this nature. Dividing responsibilities or, if possible, transferring them entirely to a collective body, such as the council, seems to be an interesting solution in the view of school leaders.

The previous issue leads us to think that conceptions of school management therefore reflect political positions and conceptions about man and society (Libâneo, 2001). Throughout the previous text, it was possible to identify that, in order for democratic management to actually take place, it is necessary for the collective to participate in all school issues.

For there to be participation, good communication must be established between those involved. The perspective that this character of something that is public, that crosses the common interest with visibility and, therefore, knowledge that is open to all, is related to modernity (Cury, 2004). According to Cury, modernity, in its broadest sense, affirms the role of the individual as the source of power.

In this context, technological resources and the internet, as Lima *et al.* (2022 p. 03) point out, "have innovated the communication system, enabling quick access to information from all over the world through it". Therefore, it is true to say that these resources have

gained ground in the world of communication and significantly influence the educational context.

In terms of efficient communication with advisors, it is necessary to make use of technology. As mentioned above, synchronous communication applications such as WhatsApp and Teams will be great facilitators of this communication. It's important to note that most people today own a cell phone and use internet services to communicate quickly.

WhatsApp has been developing in a positive way in terms of interactive communication, enabling connections across distances and it is from this perspective that it can be described as a multi-platform messaging application that allows messages to be exchanged via cell phone/smartphone. WhatsApp allows you to send messages free of charge and establish real-time contact between friends. In addition to basic messages, WhatsApp users can create groups, send images, documents, videos, make video calls, contacts, audio and much more (Lima, *et al.*, 2022, p. 03).

Inevitably, in this technological context, Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT), in general, enter the educational field in various ways. In the view of Lima *et al.* (2022), the introduction of DICTs is not intended to overcome the difficulties of education, but rather to improve the school environment.

Thus, in order to envision alternatives, it is possible to state that overcoming the problems listed and increasing the communicative and democratic potential of councils is directly proportional to expanding the aforementioned culture of participation (Souza, 2009).

According to Silva (2023), after effective communication, which will lead to council members meeting to debate and deliberate, it is essential for the manager to make room for everyone to have the opportunity to express themselves, considering all the different points of view when making decisions. Still according to Silva, for democratic management to take place in schools, it is necessary for management to allow the inclusion of ideas and exchanges of experiences in the group's decision-making processes.

Thus, in the words of Ferreira, Corrochano and Leite (2005, p. 186):

Ensuring the presence of the aforementioned parties is an exercise in democracy, insofar as it makes points of view public, proposes debate, values opposing and

favorable arguments, suggests consensus when possible, works towards rapprochement and respect when positions differ.

Paro (1997) *apud* Silvestrini (2006, p. 38) shares this idea and states that it is not a question of allowing participation, but of providing the conditions for real participation, which go beyond the merely material and also involve the distribution of authority and the possibility of exerting social pressure.

14

In this way, the School Council is conceived as a space for mediation between the different collective agents who work socially and professionally in the school, so this collegiate body becomes a channel that enables the debate of contradictory-productive thinking, a space in which proposals emerge that contribute to the improvement of collective and democratic school management practices (Souza, 2019, p. 47-48).

However, according to Lima *et al.* (2022), what is still lacking for the tools provided by the internet to be used more in the school context is mainly updating and training. We also know that this updating is of fundamental importance for the quality of debates in schools.

For this reason, the training technique discussed in this study brings the idea of raising the awareness of council members for effective participation, plus valuable technical information so that they can act efficiently within the scope of their functions: advisory, deliberative, supervisory and mobilizing. According to Paz (2005), when the work of a council shows visible results, it is common to see greater civil mobilization.

This mobilizing function, which in this study we also understand as collaboration, according to Gohn (2011, p. 62), "[...] occurs when a group of people, a community, decides and acts with a common goal, seeking, on a daily basis, the result desired by all".

Castro *et al.* (2020), in their research into the role of council members in the field of school feeding, found that none of the council members had a degree in finance or basic knowledge of the financial management of public resources.

Castro *et al.* (2020) found that the majority of council members did not have the necessary expertise to carry out activities that require technical knowledge, such as drawing up an accountability report. According to the authors, with proper training, councilors could, for example, detect irregularities in the rendering of accounts.

It is believed that, based on the training proposed by the 3Cs intervention project, councillors will be more confident in their participation, issuing opinions and official documents, thus making the collaboration system more effective. As Silva (2023, p. 09) states, "[...] in order to achieve quality education, democratic management must take place". For Perini (2007), democratic educational management becomes a process in which various factors contribute to coordinated action in the context of educational organizations and systems, with a view to mobilizing, organizing and articulating human performance aimed at improving teaching.

In general, according to Gohn (2011), the participation approach, based on the development of a civic culture, advocates the development of an active society that collaborates with the implementation of democratic principles in the context of school management. This is why it is important, as Paz (2005, p. 20) states, "[...] that the councils are touching the heart of Brazilian political culture". Since, in Paz's own words, participation is only learned when it is exercised.

The evaluation of the whole process aims to relate all this contextual analysis simultaneously with quantitative and qualitative aspects of the challenge of making the SC's actions successful, to the extent that the proposal involves all segments of the school active in decision-making. Above all, this evaluation will be based on the idea that a new history of councillor participation cannot be built in a single term and, as Paz (2005) said in her research, we must not lose heart!

4 Conclusions

The aim of this work was to build an intervention project to train counselors, with a view to strengthening democratic school management through effective participation.

We identified the necessary concepts about the SC within the context of democratic school management and some possible factors that become a challenge to the effective participation of school councillors in the school management process.

We concluded with the construction of a proposal called the 3Cs, which involves carrying out effective and efficient communication between council members, enabling greater participation in meetings, analyzing the best time and method of meeting (face-to-face or virtual). It also proposes training sessions for council members to enable them to acquire knowledge that will contribute to more technical collaboration and awareness of the SC's role in democratic school management.

With this in mind, this study aims to contribute to consolidating awareness of what participation means, with a view to making the SC's actions more efficient.

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Authorship contribution: researcher and writer.

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Responsible publisher: Genifer Andrade

Ad hoc expert: Eliane Andrade, Maria Luiza Canedo e Adelcio Machado dos Santos.

How to cite this article (ABNT):

BATISTA, Cícera Isaany Chaves. 3Cs: A construção de uma metodologia de fortalecimento da gestão democrática escolar. **Rev. Pemo**, Fortaleza, v. 6, e13164, 2024. Available at: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/revpemo/article/view/13164>

Received on May 26, 2024.

Accepted on July 5, 2024.

Published on August 8, 2024.