

## Democracy and collegiate participation in the context of a public school in Maranhão

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

This article aims to analyze the relationship between education, democracy and participation, and its repercussion in the context of public schools. Considering the methodological foundations of the policy cycle (Ball; Maguire; Braun, 2016), we started from the assumption of the school as a producer of its own discourses, which must be analyzed and understood in specific contexts. The research was based on a qualitative approach, bibliographical, documentary and field research, using semi-structured interviews as a data collection instrument with members of the School Collegiate of a public institution in the state of Maranhão. Based on discourse analysis (Foucault, 2014), from the data collected, the predominance of democracy via collegiate participation and, sometimes, a lack of understanding of the role of collegiate bodies in school management, as well as the centrality of school manager in participatory processes.

**Keywords:** Education. Democracy. Participation.

### Democracia e participação colegiada no contexto de uma escola pública do Maranhão

### Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar a relação entre educação, democracia e participação, e sua repercussão no contexto da escola pública. Considerando os fundamentos metodológicos do ciclo de políticas (Ball; Maguire; Braun, 2016), partiu-se do pressuposto da escola como produtora de discursos próprios, que devem ser analisados e compreendidos em contextos específicos. A metodologia baseou-se na abordagem qualitativa, mediante pesquisas bibliográfica, documental e de campo, com aplicação de entrevista semiestruturada como instrumento de coleta de dados junto aos membros do Colegiado Escolar de uma instituição da rede pública do estado do Maranhão. Fundamentada na análise do discurso (Foucault, 2014), a partir dos dados coletados, identificou-se o predomínio da democracia via participação colegiada e, por vezes, a falta de compreensão do papel dos órgãos colegiados na gestão escolar, bem como a centralidade do gestor escolar nos processos participativos.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação. Democracia. Participação.

## 1 Introduction

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With the process of re-democratization in Brazil, starting in 1985, the principle of democratic school management in public education was guaranteed in the 1988 Federal Constitution (FC) and, in 1996, in Law n.º 9.394/96, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LGBNE). This revealed a new model of school organization, based on the principles of democracy, autonomy, and participation, in opposition to the centralizing and bureaucratic nature that had been conducted in the field of school administration.

In Brazilian public schools, the implementation of democratic management became conditional on the election of managers by the school community and the model of collegiate participation, legally formed by a school council or collegiate board<sup>1</sup>, a class council, a student union, and an association of parents, masters, and staff (APMS). These collegiate organizations are formed by representatives from the various segments of the school community, acting to solve the school's problems and to decentralize pedagogical, administrative, and financial actions, thus collaborating for the realization of participation, autonomy, partnership, and the democratization of public schools.

The article aims to analyze the relations between education, democracy, and participation, and their repercussion in the context of the public school. The analyses of the relations between education, democracy, and participation in the context of school practice are based on the Policy Cycle (Ball; Maguire; Braun, 2016), starting from the principle that in the micro-context of the school, educational policy takes on singular forms, adjustments, and re-significations, since schools are composed of subjects of discourse and do not implement policies passively and impersonally, but rather translate and interpret based on their experiences and singularities.

The qualitative approach was used in the methodology for understanding the object of study, situating the voice of the social actors in their contexts, exploring the meaning and

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<sup>1</sup> In the State of Maranhão, within the scope of the State Education Units, it is also referred to as the school collegiate board by determination of Decree n.º 14.558, of May 22, 1995. Therefore, as this is a study in a school of the Maranhão State Education Network, we will use the term “school collegiate board” throughout the text.

interpretation of the collected data to confer validity and reliability (Gil, 2022). Bibliographic research was carried out on already published works with the contribution of different authors, such as books, articles from scientific journals, and dissertations, allowing coverage of a range of phenomena to the detriment of what could be researched directly. Documentary research was contemplated in legal texts about Brazilian education, utilizing a (re)reading and analysis consistent with the investigation objectives (Gil, 2022).

The field research, characterized by the solicitation of information directly from people about the studied problem (Gil, 2022), was carried out in a school of the Maranhão State Education Network and linked to the State Secretariat of Education of Maranhão (Seduc-MA). The research participants were the members of the School Collegiate Board from different segments: one from school management, one teacher, one student, one parent/guardian, and one staff member.

The technique used for data collection was the application of a semi-structured interview, with a script of open and closed questions, whose collected information was used solely for scientific purposes, with a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, backed by the signing of Terms of Free and Informed Consent (TFIC). The interviews were conducted between July and December 2022.

The text is structured, in addition to this introduction (first topic), by three more topics, namely: second topic: Presents the historical and political relations linking democratic management and participation in public schools, demonstrating the quotations and legal-normative texts that address these relations in the ideological context of a capitalist society.; Third topic: Analyzes the central categories in the context of practice, related to the discourses of the members of the school collegiate board of a public school in the state of Maranhão; Final topic: The considerations, which confirm the challenges and contradictions existing in the realization of the participation process that contributes quantitatively and qualitatively to the democratization of the public school.

## 2 Democracy and Participation in the Context of the School: Historical and Political Aspects

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By enshrining education as a right of all Brazilian citizens, the 1988 Federal Constitution (FC) established public education as secular, free, mandatory, and a primordial democratic instrument (Brasil, 1988). In this way, the aforementioned Constitution is configured as a field of dispute, considered by militants in defense of quality education to be a document that frustrated expectations (Fernandes, 1998), due to conceding to market demands in various aspects: legal mechanisms for transferring public funds to the private sector, democracy only as a principle of public education, and prerogatives that go against secularism.

Following the crisis that affected the global economy in the 1980s, which centered on the State's fiscal organization, antagonistic forces sought to structure new economic, political, and social arrangements. The consolidation of the neoliberal project in Brazil occurred during the governments of then-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), 1994-2002, especially with the formation of a partnership with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which intensified the role of these organizations in structuring the project that would drive State reform, causing considerable impacts on Brazilian educational policies.

In the sphere of school management, the recommendation was "decentralized management that combines with school autonomy and reforms that emphasize learning instead of teaching" (Cabral Neto; Rodriguez, 2007, p. 22). The recommendations also related to the implementation of the discourse of participation and autonomy, with the school being responsible for self-management to address its singularities, making it capable of overcoming pedagogical and administrative challenges while respecting the local culture.

Among the laws that provide direction for the democratic management of Brazilian public education, LGBNE Law n.º 9.394/96, in its Art. 3rd, prescribes the principle of democratic management of public education, presenting a text similar to that of the 1988

FC and, once again, limiting this principle only to public education. This is a clear demonstration that the social discourses defending the private sector prevail in the actual text, evidencing public management yielding to market interests (Paro, 2007).

Furthermore, in the aforementioned LGBNE, Articles 12, 13, and 14 delineate the participation of the school community in the management of the public school, as demonstrated below:

Art. 12 – Educational establishments, respecting the common norms and those of their teaching systems, shall be responsible for:

I – Elaborating and executing their pedagogical proposal;

II – Administering their personnel and their material and financial resources;

III – Ensuring the fulfillment of the established school days and class hours;

IV – Ensuring compliance with each teacher's work plan;

V – Providing means for the recovery of students with lower performance; articulating with the family and the community, creating processes of integration of society with the school;

VII – Informing parents and guardians about the attendance and performance of the students, as well as the execution of their pedagogical proposal;

[...]

Art. 13 – Teachers shall be responsible for:

I – Participating in the elaboration of the educational establishment's pedagogical proposal;

[...]

VI – Collaborating with the activities of articulation between the school, families, and the community.

Art. 14 – The teaching systems shall define the norms for the democratic management of public basic education, according to their peculiarities and in accordance with the following principles:

I – Participation of education professionals in the elaboration of the school's pedagogical project;

II – Participation of the school and local communities in school councils or equivalent bodies. [...] (Brasil, 1996, p. 5).

In Articles 12 and 13, a technical-bureaucratic orientation is noticeable, focused on the process of rationalizing school management and the activities developed in schools, failing to overcome the influences of administration theories. Regarding Article 14, according to Paro (2007), the law fell into obviousness, given that the demand for public school participation already existed since the 1980s, and the pioneering aspect of this law

lies in how participation is structured, reaffirming the co-opted and institutionalized model of organizing the school.

Paro (2007) infers that the struggles of civil society, particularly the education workers, who were engaged in establishing democracy as a principle of school management, aiming to change historical paradigms, were firmly rooted in the school as a hierarchical and authoritarian environment. However, it is evident that LGBNE Law n.º 9.934/96 evaded establishing measures that would affect the school reality and becoming a truly actionable law.

In the context of State reforms, the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso approved the National Education Plan (PNE) for the 2001-2010 decade in the National Congress. According to Dourado (2010), the PNE's strategies reflected its lack of organization, with repeated, overlapping, and unarticulated goals. Some fragilities were expressed in the financing and management of education. As a result, the approved law had nine presidential vetoes, which discharacterized the law, leaving various openings for the superimposition of the private sector over the public with explicit adherence to market logic.

Analyzing the aforementioned PNE in the context of practice, it allowed for few inferences directed towards the school reality, especially concerning the relationship between education, democracy, and participation as a possibility for school transformation. It is verified that the PNE 2001-2010 constructed goals and strategies for Brazilian education but abstained from creating mechanisms that would provide practical conditions for its objectives to be achieved, such as the financial omission, making it an unpracticable policy (Dourado, 2010).

In 2008, after years of policies under the Workers' Party government, during the second term of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the National Basic Education Conference (Coneb) took place, marking the government's commitment to formulating a new PNE. Following municipal, intermunicipal, state, and national articulations, the collective efforts for the legal and democratic structuring of the new PNE occurred in 2010, during the National Education Conference (Conae), with a debate on the reference



document themed "Building the Articulated National Education System: The National Education Plan, Guidelines, and Action Strategies," and also during the Conae held in 2014, themed "The PNE in the Articulation of the National Education System: popular participation, federative cooperation, and collaboration regime."

From these efforts, Law n.º 13.005/2014 was approved, establishing the PNE (2014-2024), with 20 general goals and specific strategies, addressing Brazilian education in its diverse singularities and establishing deadlines to remedy historical problems of national education. The PNE 2014-2024 followed the structure of the other legal instruments in force in Brazil concerning participation and democracy as a form of decentralization of management in the school context. However, it is understood that such legal precepts encounter difficulties in constructing management based on participatory planning, in the face of the power that for years has been materialized in the figure of the school manager. Law n.º 10.066/2014, which established the Maranhão State Education Plan (PEE-MA), regarding democratic management, understands that:

To ensure conditions, within a two-year period, for the implementation of the democratic management of education, through the direct participation of the school community in the election of managers, associated with technical criteria of merit and performance within the Maranhão public schools (Maranhão, 2014, p. 27).

Among the strategies that articulate democracy and participation in the current Maranhão State Education Plan (PEE-MA), item 20.4 defined the creation of the Education Counselor's House, with the participation of school counselors for the socialization of information about education in Maranhão. Additionally, strategy 20.7 defined the expansion and strengthening of the school council as a democratic body (Maranhão, 2014).

According to Verde (2022), strategy 20.4 has not been implemented to date, as there is no house in Maranhão responsible for housing a participatory council with the objectives defined in the current PEE-MA. Among the political measures to achieve strategy 20.7, for the expansion and strengthening of the school council, in Verde's (2022) perspective, it is understood that the measures taken by the public authority often consist

of the electoral process for school counselors, which in many cases is marked by the co-optation of the collegiate body by the school management. In other words, this inference reveals the fragilities of representative democracy even in micro-social contexts.

### 3 Democratic-Participative Leadership: An Analysis of the Context of Practice

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The implementation of democratic leadership as a foundation and practice of school administration is related to the transformation of school reality and the overcoming of various paradigms, among them, authoritarianism. In the formulation of the concept of democratic management defended by Souza (2009), the democratic school would aim for the constitution of an education committed to the transformation of reality.

According to Paro (2006), democratic participation does not occur spontaneously; it is a historical process of collective construction, requiring the provision of institutional mechanisms that not only enable but also incentivize participatory practices in public schools. Consequently, the manager must play a leadership role in the school, developing and controlling certain activities, and coordinating the institution's staff toward participatory planning.

It is noteworthy that a large part of schools concentrates power in the figure of the manager, reaffirming the relationship between management and power. Even though advances have been recorded in the legal field, more apparent after 1980, with the institutionalization of various instances of social participation that sought to distance people from all cultural relationships stemming from the dictatorial period, the school environment still exhibits various tendencies toward power concentration and unilateral decision-making.

The prevalence of the authoritarian tendency in the school environment uses discourse to legitimize power, and it also presents another perspective by strengthening discourses with power, as these are already part of the utterance of the actors legitimized in the institution's own structures (Foucault, 2014).



As an example of this reality, it stands out that, when questioned about participation in the school and collegiate bodies, the representative of the school management segment explained: “It doesn't always happen because there is such a 'crazy' dynamic of activities and obligations in the school, which makes it difficult to occur.”

Using the school's dynamic to justify non-participation is an appropriation of power and discourses to the point of seeking to neutralize, in discourses and practices, the multiple possibilities and other ways for the institution to act. The dynamic of the authoritarian school is rigid, inflexible, and linear. And this dynamic is constituted in a historical process of non-participation.

Neither the dynamic nor the activities and obligations of the school routine should be understood as justifications for the centralization of power. It is important to highlight that it is precisely in this routine and in the development of the school's daily activities that the most genuine forms of practicing democracy are presented.

In this sense, from Souza's perspective (2009, p. 5):

It does not seem possible to eradicate authoritarianism by being authoritarian, to build dialogue by being demagogic, or to overcome violence by acting in a prejudiced way. People in schools often use their authority to define what is right and what is wrong, linking the former, for example, to attitudes of control and even submission, and the latter to attitudes of subversion.

Thus, it is understood that possibilities exist for overcoming authoritarianism and the concentration of power based on mechanisms created within the school itself, such as the school collegiate board, the class council, and the school fund/cashier. The Bylaws of the Maranhão State Council of Education also mandate the creation of the teachers' council as a collegiate body articulated with the management of the public school. However, the analyzed school does not have this instance institutionalized, nor did the research participants present discourses that allowed for the construction of inferences about this body in the context of practice.

A escolha do colegiado escolar, do conselho de classe e da caixa The choice of the school collegiate board, the class council, and the school fund/cashier as the object of analysis for this research stemmed from the understanding that all are collegiate instances that enable activities related to public school management, involving moments of decision-making, conflict resolution, confrontation, and the interplay of interests, contradiction, among other possibilities.

Considering that the PEE-MA (Law n.º 10.099/2014) does not present data that covers the characterization of these collegiate bodies, and considering their importance for understanding democratic management, support was sought in the analysis of the Bylaws of the Maranhão State Council of Education, which expresses its conception of the collegiality of the bodies: “Collegiate Bodies are those intended to provide technical-pedagogical, administrative, and financial advisory services to the establishment’s activities and shall have their competencies explicit in these Bylaws” (Maranhão, 2016, p. 37).

In the state of Maranhão, the following collective instances are considered institutionalized collegiate bodies: the school collegiate board, the class council, the teachers' council, and the school fund/cashier (Maranhão, 2016). During the research, it was noted that the school does not differentiate between the class council and the teachers' council, thus they were analyzed without distinction, respecting the interpretation given by the school.

The school collegiate board, among its various potentialities in the process of democratizing the public school, can contribute to confronting the expressions of the patrimonialistic culture that permeate these institutions. There is also another potentiality tied to the formulation of diffuse discourses, explained within its own nature of composition, involving the participation of diverse segments of the school community (management, teachers, students, staff, family, and others).

Regarding the concept of the school collegiate board, the School Bylaws of the State Public Education Establishments of Maranhão state that it: “(...) is a representative body with a deliberative, consultative, supervisory, evaluative, and mobilizing function in matters

concerning the pedagogical, administrative, and financial management of state public network schools” (Maranhão, 2016).

Its composition shall be instituted by the manager as an ex-officio member, teachers, students, specialists, administrative staff, and parents or guardians. The method of filling the position must be through direct election, in which each segment of the school is responsible for electing its representative. After being elected, the position can be held for up to two years, with the possibility of re-election for the same period.

Beyond the policy aspects, this research also stems from the board's role in the formulation of discourses in the school routine, where “[...] subjects are ideologically positioned, but are also capable of acting creatively in realizing their own connections between various practices and ideologies to which they are exposed and restructuring positioning practices and structures” (Fairclough, 2019, p. 121).

The ideological positioning can be understood from two perspectives, Through the analysis of discourses about the participants' trajectories, considering their singularities and the ways their subjectivities relate to the research field. Through the analysis of the discourses formulated by the members of the school collegiate board, a collegiate body that, by its nature, presumes participation, critical thinking, and the defense of interests and discourses of the segment it represents.

In the analysis of the local context, the discourses highlight the ways the members of the school collegiate board use to legitimize management practices, how their functions are structured, and the roles they assume within this organization. It is worth noting that in many cases, the trajectories of the research participants become conditional to the role they occupy and influence the discourses they legitimize.

This relationship can be exemplified in the interview with the representative of the staff segment:

The election for the school collegiate board involved choosing the candidate; we were invited by the manager, and everyone agreed because they already knew the people, but there was an honest election, with ballot boxes and actual voting. There was no competition in any segment because

everyone knew the person who was nominated was the right one for the position.

Based on the analysis of the discourse above, it was identified that the school complies with the legal determinants, following the institutionalized parameters, but constructing secondary adjustments that direct the process to have a singular nature. This adjustment is articulated by the school manager, who uses their institutionalized power to conduct the process—which should be one of direct election with democratic choices and possibilities—turning it into a pre-arranged process, where the community only performs the role of legitimizing what has already been decided.

When presenting his conception of the school collegiate board, the representative of the school management segment explained in the interview: "The school collegiate board is a democratically constituted and instituted body, being deliberative over the school's actions." The manager's discourse enters into contradiction with the practice developed in the institution, as the constitution and institution of a collegiate body based on democracy must distance itself from authoritarian practices, power plays, and individual interests that nullify collectivity, making the latter a mere legitimizer of the discourses, silencing its democratic possibilities in the policy-in-use.

The activities developed by the school collegiate board, according to the interview with the management segment representative, are as follows: "We seek them a lot for financial decisions, to help decide how to invest in things, and when some conflict situation arises." Furthermore, the interviewee explained: "We carry out accountability, projects, and actions from within the school."

However, during the interview with the teacher segment representative, discrepancies were identified regarding the information presented above. The teacher's representative informed that "the school collegiate board, it happens, where we have representatives to supervise and check where the money will be applied. My actual participation in the collegiate board is at the time of signing the papers." With this discourse, it is possible to infer the management's priority in resolving financial issues, i.e., those

related to the school's budget. However, in the State of Maranhão, these bodies legally have deliberative, consultative, supervisory, and mobilizing functions (Maranhão, 2016).

The process presented in the teacher segment's discourse as "signing papers" is here understood as the legitimization of decisions already taken, in this case, made autocratically by the manager. When addressing the concept of decision, the School Bylaws of the State Public Education Establishments of Maranhão present a perspective different from what happens in the field of practice: "decisions are taken by means of consensus or vote, with each component having the right to a single vote" (Maranhão, 2016, p. 38).

Regarding the meetings of the school collegiate board, which essentially should be moments for the expression of diffuse discourses and the formulation of consensus in dissent, they end up not taking place in the context of the analyzed institution. According to the management segment representative, such circumstances occur due to the school's own dynamic. However, he admits that, institutionally, there are pre-established dates for this: "In our school calendar and now in the State Secretariat of Education, in the last managements, a monthly date for the collegiate meeting comes in the reference calendar itself."

In the activity calendar present in the school's Pedagogical Political Project (PPP), eight annual meetings are established, and these are articulated with the meetings of the school fund/cashier, demonstrating yet another dysfunction of the school collegiate board's nature and a distortion of its functions. Legally, the school collegiate boards of the state education network should meet monthly; semi-annually for report formulation; and extraordinarily, whenever necessary (Maranhão, 2016).

However, according to the interview with the teacher segment representative:

We have never held meetings, we simply don't have them. We never debate anything; it's just for signing. This should be changed a little bit, in fact, this has to be changed completely so that we have a voice in the decisions and decide: where the money will be applied. I think the community has a right to know.

The composition of the said school collegiate board was formed in 2018. Considering that the data for this research were collected in 2022, the discourse above identified that the school has not gathered its counselors for four years. It is worth noting that the report from this segment expresses a desire for changes regarding what is established, showing that no matter how strong the process of domination and co-optation of this segment is, there is a discursive awareness of contradiction.

No matter how minimalist the understanding of the function of school collegiate boards may be, the need for change regarding their translation, interpretation, and adjustments in the field of practice are reasons for criticism and a desire for change. These interpretations relate to the analyzed discourse from the teacher segment representative: "this should be changed a little bit, in fact, this has to be changed completely so that we have a voice in the decisions and decide: where the money will be applied. I think the community has a right to know."

The discourses of the members of the school collegiate board often demonstrate their functions as merely legitimizing decisions, especially in the financial field, as highlighted previously. The discourses also demonstrate a lack of clarity between the nature, constitution, and functions of the school collegiate board, often attributing specificities to it that would belong to the school fund/cashier, which reflects the practical field. In this way, in the power play, both instances become confused and are nullified in terms of their potential as instances that, based on their specificities, can contribute to the democratization of the public school.

The debates about the school fund/cashier are located alongside the economic, social, political, and educational transformations that are directed towards the process of State modernization. The institution of the school fund/cashier is articulated with the movement of decentralization of public school management with the transfer of resources to be managed by the schools.

The discourses that formulated the policy of financial decentralization that resulted in the school fund/cashier as the policy should be understood as:



[...] a process of decision-making and management, in a movement towards the tip of the system, to the institution directly responsible for providing services, in this case, the school. It seeks, [...] on the one hand, to bring the system closer to the consumer (a notion privileged by the neoliberal approach, from a perspective where all relations are seen as market relations), in order to enable faster responses from the system to their expectations. It seeks, on the other hand, to reduce the hierarchical structure within the system, enabling decisions closer to the place of execution, thus reducing the distance between conception and execution (Farah, 1995, p. 48).

The purpose of the decentralization process lies in the insertion of new actors in public sector management, adhering to the private management model which, in consonance with the neoliberal model, privileges the outsourcing of services, transfer of responsibility, minimizing the State's attributions through privatization and the transfer of activities to the market. Among the most affected State sectors is the management of public funds. In schools, this movement can be exemplified by the establishment of the school fund/cashier, which is structured based on the discourse of school institutions' autonomy and is configured as a private entity aiming at capturing financial resources from both the public and private sectors.

Cabral Neto and Almeida (2007, p. 40) state that, since then, the school fund/cashier "constitutes an institutional body with the responsibility of managing the financial resources allocated to the school unit." The authors exemplify possible sources of income that usually comprise the school fund/cashier's budget: "State subsidies; aid granted by the Federal Government, State, and municipalities; income derived from the exploitation of cafeterias and other services instituted by the school; family contributions; partnerships; and resources from other community instances" (Cabral Neto; Almeida, 2007, p. 40).

The transformation of the school fund/cashier into policy was gradual, facing several obstacles, such as: lack of structure and knowledge for the regulation of this body; bureaucracy in financial transfers from official instances; the search for non-governmental resources; co-optation, lack of training and information on the part of fiscal counselors; and lack of autonomy regarding the spending of financial transfers (Cabral Neto; Almeida, 2007).

According to the School Bylaws of the State Public Education Establishments of Maranhão, it states that:

Art. 143 - The School Fund/Cashier is a private civil association with legal personality, non-profit, institutionalized by Decree and regulated by Ordinance, which accredits the school to receive and administer financial resources intended to supply its basic needs, with an administrative and deliberative function (Maranhão, 2016, p. 40).

The guidance given by the Maranhão State Secretariat of Education is that the school fund/cashier should be constituted by the General Manager, who automatically assumes the position of president of this body via appointment ordinance, and by a treasurer, secretary, alternates, and a fiscal council, elected by the members of the school community (Maranhão, 2016).

When searching the discourses of the members of the school collegiate board for an understanding of the reality of the school's financial administration, few data were identified that would collaborate with the elucidation of the practices related to the execution of the activities developed by the school fund/cashier. It is emphasized, however, that there were discourses that do not clarify the limits and possibilities of action between the school collegiate board and the school fund/cashier. This is presented in the interview with the school management segment representative:

Part of the budget that maintains the school comes from the PDDE, which is the Direct Money at School Program, where we receive two installments per year. There is the state education fund, where we should receive four installments per year—it's too small a amount to maintain the school; there is money for school meals, and that's it.

The Direct Money at School Program (PDDE), managed by the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE) of the Ministry of Education (MEC), was created in 1995 as a financial resource decentralization policy for education. It allows Basic Education schools to receive, manage, and supervise public resources, integrating various actions aimed at improving the physical and pedagogical infrastructure of schools and assisting in

school self-management in financial, administrative, and didactic plans, thus contributing to raising Basic Education learning indices (Mota *et al.*, 2021).

The functioning of the PDDE presupposes the existence of an Executive Unit (UEX), also called a school fund/cashier. This body is responsible for capturing the funds transferred to the school once a year, considering the number of students accounted for by the School Census of the year prior to the transfer.

According to Mota *et al.* (2021), the PDDE was the first federal program to transfer financial resources directly to public schools, used for the acquisition of consumables, permanent use material, equipment, for carrying out repairs and services necessary for maintenance, conservation, and physical structure improvement, for learning assessment, for the implementation of the pedagogical project, and for the development of educational activities. That is, it is characterized as a program that transfers complementary resources to schools in an attempt to effect democratic management with community participation in decision-making.

Regarding the calculation of the amount transferred to schools, in an interview, the school management segment representative explained that: "(...) they are values that are not sufficient, because they are based on the School Census from the previous year, so the number of students is always different." Therefore, despite the program's objective to impact school institutions, collaborating as a creditor for physical and pedagogical infrastructure improvements, with the acquisition of materials and services, the method of calculating the transfers compromises its effectiveness, since the enrollment count in one school year varies compared to the other, resulting in outdated amounts.

In the case of the school, the empirical field of this research, the school management segment representative explained that: "our enrollment number is only growing, causing the funds passed by the Direct Money at School Program to be insufficient."

When referring to other resources that finance school activities, various segments point to the State Education Fund. The teacher segment interviewee emphasizes: "I only know about the state funds, just that!" The student segment interviewee: "I believe it comes

from the Secretariat of Education." And the staff segment interviewee: "I know there are funds from the Secretariat of Education, but I don't know about the others."

Also concerning financial resources, the community's participation in the management of these resources deserves attention. This statement is made based on the discourses of the research participants, who demonstrated little knowledge about the financial management of the analyzed school. According to the interview with the teacher segment representative, the following information was obtained: "I have never participated in budget planning; what I do is sign the papers, I don't even get to read about what is being spent, how it is being spent. The school has never had a moment of accountability with the community. If it did, I don't remember." Corroborating the teacher segment's discourse, the student segment informed that: "I have never had contact with this bureaucratic part, nor has anything ever been mentioned."

The explanation for the lack of participation of certain segments of the school collegiate board in the school's financial management can be found in the discourse of the school management segment representative: "When possible, we sit down with the collegiate board; when it is a very urgent need, only the management team sits down, and then we decide what we should do and list the priorities." This discourse demonstrates the centralization in financial decision-making, taking on an even greater proportion in another statement: "What also happens is that when we hold the meeting, I have already more or less listed what the needs are, and among them, we decide the priorities."

According to Barros and Oliveira (2024), for the process of school democratization to occur, it is essential that the manager share information and financial resources originating from municipal, state, and/or federal programs with the entire school community, and that the decisions that are best for the school be collectively made. It is important that all segments of the internal and external school community become aware of the universe of public education financing, including its origins, forms, and possibilities of application, implying collective and shared work by several people to achieve the same objectives (Barros; Oliveira, 2024).

In disagreement with the discourses of the teacher and student segments, the staff segment interview explains that: "I have already participated in budget debate moments in the collegiate board; it always happens there." When asked about how these moments occur, the interviewee explained that: "funds come in to be distributed, there is a discussion with the members of the collegiate board." The forms of participation in financial management are also expressed by the school management segment as follows: "We generally do this, we call at least the collegiate members of the teachers, students, and staff and we talk."

The discourse of the staff segment and the school management segment demonstrates their conceptions of participation. Meanwhile, the other segments express that the passive forms of participation in financial management do not meet their expectations. These segments defend what Gohn (2019) identifies as institutionalized and co-opted participation, marked by an unfair power play that, often hidden by the lack of legitimacy of the collegiate instances, serves as a validation of the dominant discourses and as an instrument for the perpetuation of power.

The absence of a discourse from the parents/guardians segment was not due to silence or analytical omission. Rather, a lack of understanding about the nature and functions of the body to which they belong was observed in these discourses. This segment did not answer the question addressed to them but presented a new question: "I believe it is the student representatives, giving students a voice. I think it is formed by students, teachers, and the manager mediates. I think it's what in my time was called the student union (grêmio), right?".

The distance between participatory possibilities, collaboration with the democratization of the public school, and the school reality is also presented in the discourses about the class council, which aims to collaborate with the teaching-learning process and should be composed of teachers, students, and education specialists (Maranhão, 2016).

According to the School Bylaws of the State Public Education Establishments of Maranhão, its prescribed functions to guide the performance of the class council are:

- I - Analyzing the teaching and learning process, considering all involved elements;
- II - Proposing measures aimed at improving the teaching-learning process;
- III - Cultivating good relationships between teacher and student, in order for them to work in a climate of friendship and mutual respect;
- IV - Receiving, analyzing, and forwarding student demands;
- V - Analyzing the student's evaluation process during the school year and, if applicable, proposing new evaluation strategies;
- VI – Meeting after the final recovery studies to deliberate on the approval or failure of students, re-evaluating the results regarding the achievement of expected learning;
- VII - Executing other related activities. (Maranhão, 2016, p. 39).

Thus, policy aspects deliberate on the functions of the class council, emphasizing its role in the teaching and learning process for monitoring, encouraging this space to be proactive and to establish relationships with various segments in the institutions, especially in strengthening the relationship between teacher and student.

It is observed that the student segment considers that the analyzed school has not been fulfilling its functions related to strengthening relationships within the school space, nor including all segments in the composition of the class council, as provided for in the bylaws that regulate the functioning of this body. According to the interview with the student segment representative:

I don't really know about the class council; they never explained what the council was to us. But, what was conveyed, what we imagined it to be, was the meeting of teachers to debate the situation of certain students, where behavior, performance, family context were evaluated, and how he ended up in that situation, and in the end they decided whether he would pass or not. But students did not participate; it was only the teachers and school management.

The discourse evidenced a recurring practice in public schools in the structuring of class councils, which stray from their purposes, becoming a moment of punishment for students with low performance throughout the school year. Thus, this body becomes an instance of power and coercion, where the student is the defendant for their failure. In this way, the school loses the opportunity to provide new moments of learning and recovery in the educational process, fulfilling its true function as an educational institution.



The perception of the staff segment indicates that the following participate in this moment: "the coordinator, manager, teachers who discuss the student, their absences, why they are not understanding the activities. So, it is discussing that, how they are going to help this student." The construction of the discourse around "helping the student" or "deciding about the student" is also presented by the parents/guardians segment: "I think it is the moment when the school gets together to decide which students will fail and which will pass." The discourse of the teacher segment during the interview presents elements about the reality that align with the other discourses but is also permeated by new elements:

It is a moment that happens in the school to check on the situation of our students, grades, behavior, school attendance. Through it, we were going to detect what is happening to help, to call the family. The school makes a big mistake, because schools call the family when the student is already in the abyss; we have to do the opposite too, call to praise.

Thus, the teacher raises a criticism of the evaluative role focusing only on the summative, not considering the role of processual evaluation and its potential that effectively contributes to students with low performance. Such a discourse contrasts with the school culture of only approaching families when the institution can no longer cope with its attributions.

When asked about the composition of the class council, the teacher segment representative informed that: "who participates is the management and teachers, but I think it should be more open, because the literature says there must be other representatives, but the students don't participate. Since we are going to do the right thing, let's work as it should be."

Given the above, it becomes clearer how the teacher's discourse is formed, mainly based on theoretical foundations, even if she is not conscious of it, but which is articulated with the discourse she delivered. Thus, it presents the disarticulation between theory and practice, between policy and policy-in-use, between possibilities and reality.

Thus, it is understood that in the analyzed school, the collegiate bodies present a model of limited participation in school management, as the weaknesses of the institutionalized participation model are expressed, where power plays distort the process

of institutionalization and constitution of these bodies, neutralizing and weakening the discourses that present contradictions. In this way, they become aligned with the school management, serving to legitimate the power centralized in the figure of the manager.

## 4 Final Considerations

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In Brazil, the established discourses between education, democracy, and participation gained prominence starting in the 1980s, based on the struggles for the country's re-democratization process. In addition to theoretical and practical contributions, these discourses underpinned the formation of the policies that reflect the interplay of interests and power disputes, which contrast and contradict conceptions of society, humanity, school, democracy, and participation.

Various legal-normative instruments were approved to institutionalize participation through collegiate bodies, which would assume a central role in the democratization of public schools. However, the analysis departs from the understanding of politics as a living discourse (Foucault, 2014), capable of being interpreted and enacted in the context of the school, expressing the relationships and power dynamics present in the micro-context.

In the context of the analyzed school, the data evidenced that the pedagogical, political, and organizational structure still presents remnants of the historically constituted prominence of the school manager. This individual seizes and legitimizes the discourse for the maintenance of their power, acting in two ways: justifying the non-participation of the other segments of the school community to the detriment of the school's routine; and co-opting the collegiate bodies to serve as legitimizers of an autocratic management.

The data demonstrate that the discourses in the school express power relations and the position that each subject occupies in the institution (Foucault, 2014). Students, parents, and staff are the segments that presented the most rationalized data regarding non-participation, while the teacher segment expresses restlessness and criticism regarding the established reality.

A challenge in implementing democratic management in the analyzed school is the lack of understanding of the nature and function of the collegiate bodies. However, it is understood that the omission of this knowledge by those who understand the rules of the game is part of the machinery of the process of domination of those who are unaware.

Thus, it is understood that in the analyzed school, democratic management, as a principle and practice, is configured as a "becoming" and as a project that needs to overcome several challenges, such as: authoritarianism, clientelism, co-optation, and others. These are not exclusively challenges for a Brazilian public school located in the state of Maranhão, but reflect the organizational culture of many others, expressing the roots that are yet to be overcome in the history of Brazilian society.

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**Editora responsável:** Genifer Andrade

**Especialista *ad hoc*:** Nárgila Mara da Silva Bento e Jaqueline Rabelo de Lima.

## Como citar este artigo (ABNT):

VERDE, Alexandre Viana.; PEREREIRA, Diego Rodrigo.; CARDOZO, Maria José Pires Barros. Democracia e participação colegiada no contexto de uma escola pública do Maranhão. **Rev. Pemo**, Fortaleza, v. 8, e15383, 2026. Available at: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/revpemo/article/view/15383>

Received on April 4, 2025.

Accepted on September 2, 2025.

Published on January 1, 2026.