

A System for Choosing School Managers: A Further Challenge for the Development of Policies at the Municipal Education Level

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Abstract

This study is part of a greater project related to educational policy. The proposal is to discuss and contextualize the system for choosing school managers in the country, and specifically to introduce an ongoing research on the Internal Selective Process for choosing school directors – PROSED, carried out by the Municipal Secretariat for Education (SEMED), in Manaus, State of Amazonas, Brazil. The discussions and study of different systems try to identify some elements, which can be used to review and re-discuss the existing educational policies emphasizing, above all, the relation between the procedures for choosing the directors and the democratization of the school management.

Keywords: Education; public policies; management provision

Introduction

To analyze the way public school directors are chosen will necessarily imply a reflection on education policies. To choose a school director means to define the type of management one desires for that school.

It is important to observe that the performance of the director, his/her duties and liaison with the school change depending on the way he/she has been chosen and depending on the type of management that is implemented in the school system (PADILHA, 1998).

As of the eighties, and particularly today a major concern as to the procedure for choosing school directors, in the municipal districts and States in Brazil has been verified. And, indeed, this has raised a permanent questioning on the role of the school director in the construction of a democratic management of the public school.

To reflect on the democratic management of schools, particularly on the choice and action of the school director, starting from the representation of teachers and the other subjects involved in the running of schools. Such democratic management could contribute towards the resolution of conflicts, which derive from such internal relationships, aiming to improve the work and internal relationships within the institution, by improving particularly the teaching quality.

Studies and debates on the learning management and improvement have been taking a significant and important role in the educational field. The institutionalization of the democratic management of education, legally supported in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, is one of the improvements in the attempt to secure that school institutions can develop and educational practice grounded on democratic principles and every day actions.

Democratic management is understood as a State principle in educational policies, which reflects the very Democratic State Based on the Rule of Law and is reflected on it by postulating the presence of the citizens in the process and in the product of governmental policies. (CURY, 2002).

Within a new educational practice, the democratic management can only exist to the extent the school autonomy is returned.

LDB, the law that regulates education in Brazil, is prodigal when dealing with the autonomy in the educational management. It is important to underline that managerial autonomy should incorporate the decentralization of three major dimensions: the first, is to be understood a historically constructed strategy within general government administration in all its levels of operation; the second dimension has to do with the commitment towards decentralized management as one of the main strategies of the development project of a Country, of a State or any other place; the third dimension, sees democratic management as an instance of great significance to the educational process.

According to Dourado, democratic management,

[...] is a process of learning and political struggle that is not circumscribed to the limits of the educational practice but envisages, in the specificities of such social practice and of its relative autonomy, the possibility of creating channels of effective participation and of learning of the democratic “game”, and consequently, of rethinking the structures of the authoritarian power, which permeate social relationships and, within them, educational practices (1998, p.79)

The democratic management, therefore, requires not only more than simple changes in organizational structures, but also changes in paradigm, which would set the foundations for the construction of an educational proposal and the development of a type of different administration, much beyond the existing authoritarian standards, which have been imposed by bureaucratic organizations.

It is, further, understood that democratic management is not a simple process or will it be a short-term achievement, nor will it be an endless unattainable process. This means that this type of management is to become an action, a practice in the school linked to the school pedagogic-political project and to the establishment of School Boards, which will effectively influence the school management as a whole. Steps are, therefore, necessary in order to secure administrative, pedagogic and financial autonomy, without discharging the State from its obligation towards public education.

Systems for Filling the Job/Post of a Public School Director

The way school directors are chosen is perhaps the theme that has greatly motivated scholars and researchers to produce theoretical-conceptual reflections and empirical investigation on the democratic management of education.

In the Brazilian educational system, the post of public school director has been traditionally filled through an appointment by the governor or the mayor, in general, from indications made by officers from the Secretariats of Education or by regional party-political leaderships. According to Mendonça,

The degree of political interference on the school environment derived from such a procedure, has allowed political patronage to have a fertile ground for its growth in the school. [...] Indication as a mechanism for choosing directors can, therefore, be understood as neither as democratizing nor as favoring administrative and bureaucratic modernization (2000, p.130-31)

Criticism of the procedure of choosing school directors on political grounds has given rise to the search for alternative mechanisms such as public exams and direct elections. Election for directors has been the process that has best materialized the struggle against patronage and authoritarianism in the administration of education. This has been the main battle flag in favor of the democratic management of public education, for many years now.

As of the enactment of the Federal Constitution in 1988, experiments with elections of directors have expanded with the educational system. In many instances, elections have been regulated through legal instruments of different nature. Problems and limitation of this procedure have been identified in many studies and have reached factors such as the excess of personalism on the part of the candidate, lack of qualification of some candidates, populism and patronizing attitudes, typical of the old party-politics. The increase of conflicts among the school community segments and the behavior of appropriation of the post have been highlighted, among others. However, it is essential to expand the horizons of democratization of management, jointly emphasizing the choice format model and the exercise of the duty. The way the post is filled may not define the managerial type, but it certainly interferes in its course.

Without trying to solely ascribe to the election the guarantee of democratization in the administration, it is necessary to provide support to this thesis as an instrument for the exercise of democracy. (DOURADO, 2001).

Another identified process for filling the post of director is public exam carried out through tests or tests and titles. The tests in general are written, as essay questions or not, and the title examination is evidence as to the specific qualification of the candidate for the post. The formal argument for this type of selection is to defend the public morality avoiding political patronage. Criticism to this mechanism pinpoints the privilege of technical competence at the expense of assessment of political leadership.

Some scholars have also indicated the mix scheme, a system that combines different formats for choosing the director, in most cases, envisaging two or more phases in the selection procedure, for example, exams, which assesses the technical competence and the academic background of the candidate, in addition to his/her administrative experience, leadership capacity, among other pre-requirements.

With the purpose of outlining the most popular system for filling the job/post of a school director within the Brazilian educational context in the nineties, limited by the experiences developed in the state and municipal capital cities in Brazil, the research work **Choice of school directors**, part of the research program Policies and Management of Education in Brazil of the National Administration, of Researchers in Administration of Education was carried out. Said research work found that *direct election* is the most widely used form among the systems for choosing school directors in State Secretariats of Education [31, 3%]. The result further indicates that a significant number of secretariats of education [22, 9%] adopts a *free indication by an authority* system (DOURADO, 2001).

Mechanisms for Choosing School Directors in Municipal Schools in Manaus

In 1976, when the Municipal Secretariat for Education began to be restructures, the process of choosing school director through *indication* was also initiated. In the process of choosing the school director up to this date, two direct elections have taken place, one in 1992, during the secretary José Melo administration and the other in 1996. In 1998, upon the creation and approval of the *Regimento Geral das Escolas da Rede Municipal de Ensino* some changes have taken place as to the system of indication of school directors, as stated in said General Statutes under Chapter I – The Indication of the Director – Section: The Selective Process:

Art. 105 – Director of Schools of the Municipal Education Network shall be indicated by the Municipal Secretariat of Education, from a list of three discerningly selected candidates.

This form of selection went up to 2004, and is among the most popular system already identified in studies in the 80s, namely, “director indicated by lists of three or six people”(Dourado, 2001, page 84). It should be observed, however, that this system has been applied very late by the Municipal education policy, in Manaus.

It is hereby worthy of register that one of the proposals approved during the 2001 I Conference of Municipal Education was that of establishing direct, democratic and universal elections for school directors and CMEIS in the Municipal Education Network, as of 2003. Such proposal seems to be under study.

In the search to create new mechanisms for filling in the post of school director, The Municipal Secretariat of Education has executed and established a new proposal known as PROSED as of 2005.

What is PROSED?

It is an internal selective process for school directors, within the context of the Municipal Education administration that makes use of technical and academic criteria and participatory evaluation of the community for a three-year mandate.

The Municipal Administration assumes da historical responsibility for changing the electoral process for its school directors. For the Municipal Education managers, PROSED is not a magical formula for choosing good directors, but rather a system for selecting its school directors that assures greater possibilities of choosing the best ones.

PROSED's¹ is founded on article 206 of the Federal Constitution and on article 3 of LDB (Education Law)(No. 9394/96), which regulates the guarantee of the quality standard and the democratic management of public education.

¹ Data collected with SEMED'S Administration Management (GAE) in Manaus.

The Municipality of Manaus Organic Law proclaimed on April 5, 1990, also supports PROSED in various articles. Article 86 foresees that it is incumbent on the Secretary of Education to plan, guide, coordinate and supervise the bodies and entities of the Municipal Administration in the area of its competence. For the authors of the proposal, PROSED safeguards within the law the community participation vis-à-vis the assessment of the director's performance as a form of social control by the State.

The selective process of School Directors – PROSED was approved by the Municipal Board of Education on March 3, 2005. PROSED is carried out in three phases: a) Qualification; b) Knowledge Test and Proof of Titles; and c) Participatory Evaluation. The first experience in carrying out PROSED took place in 2005 in Manaus. The timetable had foreseen the following phases and dates: applications from April 18 to 29; submission to the objective test: on May 15; result of the objective test on May 20; receipt of the titles of those who had been awarded a pass from May 23 to June 24. 649 out of 911 candidates were awarded a pass. SEMED has, today, 390 schools organized in Educational Districts: North, South, Center/South, West/Center West, East and Rural.

PROSED – Selective Process for School Director

SUMMARY CHART

(Phases)

1st. Phase	<p>Qualification</p> <p>a) To be a Municipal Secretariat of Education and Culture tenured civil servant;</p> <p>b) To have a minimum three years of effective work in schools of the Municipal Network, having finished the probational stage (Art. 41 of the Constitution);</p> <p>c) To have the title of full teaching degree issued by a Ministry of Education (MEC) accredited institution;</p> <p>d) Not having suffered any kind of administrative sanction in the last two years;</p> <p>e) To have the required availability of time for the fulfillment of the position, the use of cession from other bodies being prohibited for purposes of availability;</p> <p>f) Not to have a negative report from the Management Assessment Committee in the years prior to PROSED.</p>
2nd. Phase	<p>Knowledge Test and Proof of Titles</p> <p>a) Objective Test in Portuguese and Specific Subjects;</p> <p>b) Proof of Titles.</p> <p>Following the tests of knowledge, the appointment of the classified candidates for one year takes place.</p>
3rd. Phase	<p>Participatory Evaluation</p> <p>a) Evaluation by parents, teachers and SEMED.</p> <p>Should the evaluation prove to be positive, the director shall have his/her mandate for another year, and again evaluated at the end of the second year. The same process can be repeated up to a limit of three years. After the third year, the director cannot continue in the same school, although he/she can compete to PROSED for another managing cycle (three).</p>

Source: Manaus City Hall – SEMED – Internal Selective Process for School Director. PROSED – Manaus/2005.

Qualification, the first PROSED stage is that which guarantees that the civil servant intending to manage a municipal school to produce minimum requirements to do so.

Knowledge Tests attempt to assess the technical and academic background of the candidate. Only the candidates who have been qualified in the objective tests are eligible to participate in the *Proof of Titles*. *Participatory Evaluation* comprises the third stage of the Selective Process for post School Director, whose objective is to evaluate the development of the school management, providing a process towards the continuing improvement in the quality of public education. PROSED introduces four evaluation dimension:

- a) **Participatory Management:** This evaluates practices of participatory management, participatory planning, the establishment of partnerships, participation of parents, pupils and servants, as well as communication and socialization of information and other activities;
- b) **Administration Management:** This evaluates the administrative work performed in the school having the guidelines as contained in the Manual of Procedures as reference;

- c) Pedagogic Management: This evaluates the pedagogic work carried out in the school with the adoption of pedagogic measures, which bear in mind the pupils' learning results and the continuing qualification of teachers, leading, therefore, to the improvement in school achievement;
- d) Management of Physical and Financial Resources: This evaluates the management of physical resources (use, conservation, fitness, facilities and equipment) and the management of financial resources, the application and the rendering of account of school resources.

To cope with the proposal submitted by SEMED, the school director post would have to be an appointment that would require a dialectic, intelligent behavior of action and understanding of the situation, involving the management of all the resources particularly the cognitive one the individual has as well as his/her interpersonal rapport. It is the *know-how* that would primarily comprises empirical knowledge, practical know-how, ancient "tricks" of the trade, the skills, the quick glance, as opposed to the knowledge of engineers, to the methods prescribed by Taylorism" (Stroobants, 1997, page 140). This *know-how* is developed in concrete conditions of each situation that school directors have to face.

The Paths of a Participatory Evaluation

The Participatory Evaluation that makes up the third PROSED stage was carried out in the Municipal education network from August 14 to September 29, 2005. Nearly three hundred and sixteen schools were involved in this evaluation process.

To perform the manager's Participatory Evaluation, the servants were organized in five (5) work groups. Each group was given a type of form² to carry out their evaluation. Five (5) types of forms were used as evaluation tools. Form N. 01 was distributed to Managers of Educational Districts; form n. 02 was distributed to the Managers; form n. 03 was distributed to the Servants (teachers and non-teachers); form n.04 was distributed to the Pupils; and form n. 05 was distributed to the School Community and /or APMC.

To proceed with the application of the forms, the members of the school community were organized in meetings to discuss issues and be oriented as to the work with the presence of Educational District and SEMED representatives, who acted as supervisors.

On the occasion of the evaluation, each segment met in a room for the reading and discussion of the items and the filling of the evaluation form. As to the manager, he/she was placed in a different school environment in order to fill in form n. 02, where he/she had to outline his/her profile and comment on his/her actions as school director.

The educational process by its very nature included the concept of administration. Based on this principle, the significant role of the school director in the management of the school work organization had to be emphasized.

Pursuant to PROSED evaluation proposal, some reflections are raised: In what this type of evaluation consists? What are its significance and role in the organization of the school management?

Evaluation is understood as a primary function of the system of organization and management. This allows difficulties resulting from the daily practice through the confrontation between planning and the actual work functioning to be highlighted. It, also, aims to improve school work, for understanding the time, the difficulties, it is possible to review their causes and to find means to overcome them. Monitoring and control would confirm the result of the work, would shed some light on to errors, difficulties, successes and failures relative to what had been planned. One, therefore, asks if this was the path threaded by SEMED in the performance of its evaluation proposal?

It is worth emphasizing that a manager is the pillar of a school. The actions, which develop the entire pedagogic practice rely on the manager. For this to happen, it is necessary that he/she is sure of his/her actions and that such actions can be justified. In many cases, what happens is a lack of capacity of managers to deal with people, resorting to authoritarian attitudes.

² The applied form intended to evaluate the school director in four dimensions: participatory management; administrative management; pedagogic management and physical and financial resources management. This form contained the items required to evaluate each dimension and were distributed on a scale of five levels of performance, ranging from 90 to 100 (upper level); 70 to 80 (above average); 50 to 60 (average); 11 to 49 (below average; and up to 10 (no performance).

In this discussion, it well worth highlighting that in order to achieve a participatory evaluation as intended by PROSED, it is firstly necessary to understand that the construction of a Participatory Management depends on the struggle and mobilization of the organized civil society mainly directed towards the challenges of making it public, efficient and effective, and directed mostly towards a sole and decentralized system geared towards the building of citizenship and towards the desired social transformation. It is hereby questioned whether this is the understanding PROSED has when dealing with the evaluation of a participatory evaluation with municipal schools.

It is, therefore, understood that the major challenge of the manager is to construct a citizen school based on a Participatory Management, as this requires a behavioral change in all sectors of the school community, and the manager has to adopt a liberating posture, albeit cohesive and mindful of its social role.

An important pillar in the conquest of Participatory Management is the coherence that ought to be established between practice and theory, since one acts as a result of the other. Human beings act as a result of their needs. It is, therefore, necessary to offer an organizational climate capable of pleasurably and affectively providing the collective construction of knowledge and of the school work.

To collectively administer presupposes a participatory, democratic education, that is, to know how to listen to, to know how to communicate and to accept changes. Of all these, to know how to listen to is perhaps one of the most difficult skills to achieve, as we have no tradition in administering conflicts.

As regards school management, the word participation itself has a democratic content, and theoretically represents the influence of everyone on the school guidelines. Since they are involved in the school daily routine, they are asked to participate. They are required to become actors rather than mere spectators.

Participation is an exchange process that generates commitment. Such fact means that everyone should share success, not just responsibility. Therefore, participation is a unique condition for the existence of a democratic management, better still, one cannot exist without the other. Both are fundamental components of a democratic organizational climate. (BORDIGNON & GRACINDO, 2000).

According to Habermas (apud Gutierrez & Catani, 1998) *to participate means that everyone can contribute towards the processes of the discursive formation of the will, on equal opportunities.*

PROSED and the Work of the Manager

As far as PROSED proposal is concerned, some changes can be felt. It is important, however, to go further. There are few studies, which have dedicated themselves to the topic and its implications in the management and organization related to the work process in the school. Some issues continue without any more consistent answers, as for instance: What are the new contours in work relationships in schools in view of the changes in the system for filling in the position of a director? What are the implications of such changes in the form of choice, in the performance and in the political and pedagogic and administrative posture of school managers who have been chosen by competitive examination?

Indeed, if such issues remain open and in need of further studies, which can indicate elements to address them, many others are raised concerning the choice and performance of school directors and takes, also as reference those educational situations where community **participation** in the choice of such leaders is neither present or are carried out under a very limited manner. In what measure and in which aspects the practices and postures of the school managers are different vis-à-vis the way under which they have been “appointed” for the position? How are the work relations like in schools where the appointment of their directors takes place through political “indication” and fails to have the participation of the community? What are the differences and the similarities between the administrative/pedagogic experiences in schools whose directors have been appointed for the first time? The administration of schools today is a task for engaged educators, quite a gratifying human occupation, however terribly difficult, given the conditions within which it is developed. To be a director in whatever context, particularly in schools located in the outskirts of large cities, isolated, distant, with problems of violence, depredation of school buildings and having an unprivileged clientele to whom the most elementary human and social rights are denied is an enormous challenge. How, then, to run a school in such a context? Within such a perspective, the huge challenge for the manager is to open ways, which can enable the achievement of a participatory and democratic management. Among these, the following can be highlighted:

- Professional qualification seems to be at the root of the problem. The qualification of the educational manager will imply the development of competences and skills to enable a collective work, group leadership, the design and the forwarding of solutions of educational problems, and the construction of a pedagogic proposal within the school education, within a perspective of an ethical professional performance and with social responsibility;
- The creation of school councils, as an important instrument for decentralizing the manager's power, represents a part of the process of democratization of the educational institution.
- The design and implementation of the political/pedagogic project being concerned with in setting up a form of organization of the pedagogic work that unfolds conflicts and contradictions in the search for doing away with competitive and authoritarian relationships breaking away from the routine of the personal and rationalized command of the bureaucracy and allowing horizontal relations within the school.
- The use of direct communication mechanisms enabling the creation of links between the school and the community. The school should not be the demagogic stage of actions, which fail to immerse of its socio-political and cultural reality. Rather, it should create mechanisms for the designing and executing its own culture.

Some Conclusions

The study reaches its final stage and unveils a system for filling the position of public school management is another major challenge for the Manaus municipal educational policies. Public education system managers, as historical subjects, are incumbent on creating and consolidating new democratization mechanisms within the context of educational public policies. With the publication of the final results, the discussion of further studies shall be resumed.

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