RCMOS – Revista Científica Multidisciplinar O Saber. ISSN: 2675-9128. São Paulo - SP.
Ano VII, v.1 2026 | submissão: 26/08/2026 | aceito: 29/08/2026 | publicação: 01/09/2026

School and Family in Participatory Management: challenges and possibilities of democratic construction

Escola e Família na Gestão Participativa: desafios e possibilidades de uma construção democrática

Escuela y Familia en la Gestión Participativa: desafíos y posibilidades de una construcción democrática

Ilzenir Soares Santos – ilzenirsoares4@gmail.com
Mílvio da Silva Ribeiro – milvio.geo@gmail.com

Abstract: This article analyzes how the relationship between school and family can act as a structuring axis of participatory management, examining the challenges that limit this approximation and the possibilities of turning it into an effective democratic exercise. It is a qualitative study conducted through a bibliographic review, in which reference works on democratic management, social participation and the family-school relationship were analyzed, along with recent articles and dissertations on the subject. A critical reading of the collected material made it possible to organize the findings around four axes: the barriers that hinder family participation, the institutional mechanisms capable of transforming presence into deliberation, the need to share responsibility without blaming families, and the effects of participation on the school climate and on learning. The results indicate that families are often treated as recipients of notices rather than as decision-making subjects, which empties the democratic meaning of management. Active school councils, qualified listening and transparency in decisions proved to be conditions for authentic participation, whereas occasional and formal summoning tends to reproduce vertical power structures. It is concluded that participatory construction between school and family does not happen spontaneously: it depends on continued professional training, permanent channels of dialogue and an institutional stance that recognizes the diversity of family configurations, avoiding the conversion of social inequalities into individual blame.

Keywords: Participatory management. Family-school relationship. Democratic management.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa de que modo a relação entre escola e família pode atuar como eixo estruturante da gestão participativa, examinando os desafios que limitam essa aproximação e as possibilidades de torná-la um exercício democrático efetivo. Trata-se de uma pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, conduzida por meio de revisão bibliográfica, na qual foram analisadas obras de referência sobre gestão democrática, participação social e a relação família-escola, além de artigos e dissertações recentes sobre o tema. A leitura crítica do material reunido permitiu organizar os achados em torno de quatro eixos: as barreiras que dificultam a participação das famílias, os mecanismos institucionais capazes de transformar presença em deliberação, a necessidade de dividir as responsabilidades sem culpabilizar as pessoas e os benefícios da participação para o ambiente escolar e a aprendizagem. Os resultados indicam que a família costuma ser tratada como destinatária de comunicados, e não como sujeito de decisão, o que esvazia o sentido democrático da gestão. Verificou-se que conselhos escolares ativos, escuta qualificada e transparência nas decisões são condições para uma participação autêntica, enquanto a convocação pontual e formal tende a reproduzir estruturas verticais de poder. Conclui-se que a construção participativa entre escola e família não ocorre de forma espontânea: depende de formação continuada dos profissionais, de canais permanentes de diálogo e de uma postura institucional que reconheça a diversidade das configurações familiares, evitando converter desigualdades sociais em responsabilização individual.

Palavras-chave: Gestão participativa. Relação família-escola. Gestão democrática.

RCMOS – Revista Científica Multidisciplinar O
Saber. ISSN: 2675-9128. São Paulo - SP.
Ano VII, v.1 2026 | submissão: 26/08/2026 | aceito: 29/08/2026 | publicação: 01/09/2026

Resumen: Este artículo analiza de que modo la relación entre escuela y familia puede actuar como eje estructurante de la gestión participativa, examinando los desafíos que limitan esa aproximación y las posibilidades de tornarla un ejercicio democrático efectivo. Se trata de una investigación de abordaje cualitativo, realizada por medio de revisión bibliográfica, en la cual fueron analizadas obras de referencia sobre gestión democrática, participación social y la relación familia-escola, además de artículos y disertaciones recientes sobre el tema. La lectura crítica del material reunido permitió organizar los hallazgos en torno de cuatro ejes: las barreras que dificultan la participación de las familias, los mecanismos institucionales capaces de transformar presencia en deliberación, la necesidad de dividir las responsabilidades sin culpabilizar a las personas y los beneficios de la participación para el ambiente escolar y el aprendizaje. Los resultados indican que la familia suele ser tratada como destinataria de comunicados, y no como sujeto de decisión, lo que vaciar el sentido democrático de la gestión. Se verificó que consejos escolares activos, escucha calificada y transparencia en las decisiones son condiciones para una participación auténtica, mientras que la convocatoria puntual y formal tiende a reproducir estructuras verticales de poder. Se concluye que la construcción participativa entre escuela y familia no ocurre de forma espontánea: depende de formación continuada de los profesionales, de canales permanentes de diálogo y de una postura institucional que reconozca la diversidad de las configuraciones familiares, evitando convertir desigualdades sociales en responsabilización individual.

Palabras clave: Gestión participativa. Relación familia-escola. Gestión democrática.

1. Introduction

The term “participative management” has become almost a consensus in the Brazilian educational vocabulary. The term appears in pedagogical political projects, in documents of teaching networks and in speeches of ownership of directors. There is, however, a considerable distance between naming participation and making it happen. Among the different segments called to participate in school life, the family usually occupies an ambiguous position: it is constantly invoked as an indispensable partner, but is rarely treated as a subject who decides. Invited to newsletters, parties and campaigns, it is rarely included in the institution's pedagogical and administrative directions. It is precisely this tension that this article proposes to investigate.

Democratic management of public education is not a pedagogical choice among others; it is a constitutional principle. The Federal Constitution of 1988 enrolls it between the foundations of national education, and the 1996 Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB) reaffirms that education systems must ensure the participation of school and local communities in collegiate bodies. The legislation, therefore, already recognizes that public school belongs to the community that supports it and depends on it. The challenge lies in transforming this legal

recognition into daily practice, especially when it comes to approaching two institutions historically accustomed to relating to distance: school and family.

This approach is not trivial. School and family speak different languages, operate at different times and do not always share expectations about what it means to educate. When the contact between them is reduced to calls in moments of crisis, as a low note, a problem of behavior, an absence, the relationship tends to become marked by mutual distrust. The school perceives the family as absent; the family perceives the school as inaccessible. Breaking this cycle requires more than goodwill: it requires stable channels, specific training and a renewed understanding of the place that each occupies in the educational process.

In view of this scenario, we have the following research question: how can the relationship between school and family be an effective axis of participatory management, and what challenges and possibilities cross this construction? The general objective of this study is to analyze this relationship in the light of the literature on democratic management and social participation, identifying the obstacles that limit it and the conditions that enable it. In a specific way, we seek to discuss the conceptual and legal frameworks of participatory management, characterize the family as a subject of the school, and systematize barriers and participation strategies pointed out by recent academic production.

The relevance of the theme is justified for reasons that go beyond the administrative sphere. When the family actually participates in school decisions, the feeling of belonging is strengthened, the follow-up of the students' trajectory is expanded and a support network is built that favors permanence and learning. More than that, the experience of participation in the school space works as a learning of citizenship, both for students and adults who surround them. To neglect this dimension is to renounce one of the main instruments of democratization of the public school.

The article is organized into five sections, in addition to this introduction. The theoretical framework discusses the transition from school administration to democratic management and places the family as the subject of the educational process. The material and method section describes the procedures of the literature review. Next, the results and discussion articulate the findings around the barriers, the mechanisms of participation, co-responsibility and the effects on school life. The final considerations take up the research question and point out paths for future practice and investigations.

2. Theoretical Mark

The understanding of the relationship between school and family as an axis of participatory management requires, first, to clarify what is meant by democratic management and participation. This section covers three movements: it situates the conceptual transition from school administration to democratic management and its legal support; it discusses the place of the family as a subject and not a mere recipient of school action; and it presents school and family as interdependent contexts of human development.

2.1 From administration to democratic management: legal conceptual frameworks

During much of the 20th century, the Brazilian school was conceived from a model of management imported from the company, centered on control, hierarchy and efficiency. Vitor Paro was one of the authors who problematized this transposition by showing that the school does not produce goods, but works with human training, which makes any management that reduces students, teachers and families to the gears of a productive process inadequate (PARO, 1997). For the author, democratic management is not an organizational detail, but the coherent way of administering an institution whose purpose is to emancipate subjects. You can't form critical citizens in a school that works authoritarianly.

In the same direction, Libâneo (2013) distinguishes management administration, understanding the latter as an activity by which the means and procedures of the school are mobilized in a shared way to achieve educational objectives. Management, thus conceived, does not exempt organisation and coordination, but subordinates them to a principle of participation. Heloísa Lück, in turn, warns that participation cannot be confused with physical presence or mere consultation: participating means sharing decision-making power, taking responsibility and effectively influencing the direction of the institution (LÜCK, 2011). The author draws attention to experiences that are announced as participative, but that, in practice, only legitimize decisions already taken by the director.

This warning is important because the word participation carries gradations. There are forms of involvement that are limited to informing, others that consult without binding, and those that actually deliberate. Only the latter realize the democratic principle in its fullness. Participative management, therefore, is less measured by the number of meetings and more by the real capacity that the different segments have to affect the decisions. When this capacity does not exist, participation becomes ritual, and the ritual, over time, generates discredit.

From a legal point of view, the framework that supports this conception is robust. The 1988 Federal Constitution establishes democratic management of public education as a principle (BRASIL, 1988). The 1996 LDB details this principle by predicting the participation of professionals in the preparation of the pedagogical project and of school and local communities in councils or equivalents (BRASIL, 1996). The Statute of Children and Adolescents gives parents the right to be aware of the pedagogical process and to participate in the definition of educational proposals (BRASIL, 1990). More recently, the National Education Plan reaffirmed democratic management as a goal to be implemented in education networks (BRASIL, 2014). The legal system, as we can see, not only authorizes, but determines the participation of families.

2.2 The family as a subject, not a recipient, of the school

Recognizing the family as a subject of school management implies overcoming a still dominant representation: that of the father or mother as someone who attends school to receive information and instructions. Szymanski (2009) notes that the family-school relationship was, for a long time, marked by an asymmetry in which it was up to the school to teach and the family only to collaborate in terms defined by the institution. The author proposes dislocating this view, considering families in their concrete conditions of existence and recognizing that they have legitimate knowledge about children and young people that the school does not reach alone.

Paro (2000) devotes specific attention to this point by discussing the contribution of parents to the quality of education. For the author, the presence of families in school should not be instrumentalized only to solve problems of discipline or to raise resources; it has pedagogical and political value, because it inserts the community in the democratic control of the institution that belongs to it. When parents follow and question, the school accounts; when the school accounts, it improves. Family participation, in this reading, is also a mechanism for qualification of the public service.

There is, however, a risk that critical literature does not fail to point out. Carvalho (2000) warns that policies of parental involvement, when conceived without care, can assume an idealized family model and end up penalizing precisely the families that face the most difficulties. The author draws attention to the class and gender implications of these policies, since the responsibility for school follow-up often falls on the mothers, burdening them. To consider the family as a subject means, therefore, to recognize it in its diversity, and not to require from it a unique standard of participation.

2.3 School and family as interdependent development contexts

The psychology of development offers an additional foundation to understand why the rapprochement between school and family matters. Dessen and Poland (2007) describe both as the two main contexts of human development in contemporary societies, emphasizing that they do not work in isolation: the experiences experienced in one affect the other. When there is continuity and dialogue between these contexts, the conditions for meaningful learning expand; when there is rupture or distrust, the student is in the middle of a field of tensions.

In a previous study, Poland and Dessen (2005) argue that parents and teachers need to be encouraged to discuss and build together strategies that benefit the development of students. It is not about transferring school functions to the family, or delegating family responsibilities to the school, but about recognizing the complementarity between the two. This perspective removes both the guilt of the family for school failures and the expectation that the school alone solves issues that have deep social roots.

The systematic review conducted by Saraiva-Junges and Wagner (2016) on Brazilian studies on the subject confirms that the family-school relationship is an object of increasing interest, but still marked by approaches that favor the institution's point of view. The authors observe that, in much of the production, the systematic listening of families and the investigation of effective models of participation are lacking. This finding reinforces the relevance of a study that takes the family-school relationship not as a problem to be administered by the school, but as a construction to be shared, which leads, of course, to the field of participatory management.

3. Material and Method

This research is characterized as a qualitative study, developed through a literature review. The methodological option arises from the very nature of the problem: understanding how the relationship between school and family can structure participatory management requires interpreting concepts, confronting theoretical perspectives and organizing the knowledge already produced, tasks for which the literature review is particularly appropriate. It is not intended here to measure variables or generalize results, but to build a well-founded understanding of the theme.

The corpus of analysis was composed of three sets of sources. The first brings together reference works in the area of educational management and the family-school relationship, by authors such as Paro, Lück, Libâneo, Szymanski, Carvalho and Dessen and Poland, selected for

their recognition and for the recurrence with which they are cited in the national literature. The second set consists of scientific articles and a master's dissertation published between 2005 and 2025, which deals directly or indirectly with participatory management and the participation of families in school. The third set comprises the relevant Brazilian legal framework: the Federal Constitution of 1988, the Statute of Children and Adolescents, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education and the National Education Plan.

The selection criteria for the sources were the thematic relevance in relation to the object, the academic relevance of the authors and journals, and the current discussion, without this implying discarding classical works whose contribution remains current. Publications in Portuguese were privileged, focused on the Brazilian educational context, because this is the universe of interest of the research. Materials of a strictly opinative nature, without theoretical or empirical basis, were excluded from the analysis.

The treatment of the material followed three steps. In the first, we proceeded to the exploratory reading of the sources, in order to identify the central ideas of each author. In the second, an analytical reading was performed, in which the arguments were compared, seeking convergences, divergences and gaps. In the third stage, the findings were grouped by themes in order to allow an articulated discussion, not a simple juxtaposition of citations. This process resulted in the four axes that organize the following section: the barriers to the participation of families, the mechanisms of effective participation, the co-responsibility without blaming and the effects of participation on school life.

It is important to record a limitation inherent to the adopted design. Because this is a literature review, the study dialogues with what has already been written and does not produce primary data on concrete experiences of participation. The conclusions, therefore, have an interpretative character and make room for empirical investigations that directly listen to families, managers and teachers in their specific contexts.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the collected material allowed the identification of regularities that go through different authors and times. Next, these findings are discussed in four complementary axes, which start from the obstacles to achieving the positive effects of participation, through the mechanisms that make it possible and the necessary care for it to be fair.

The first finding is the persistence of cultural barriers that precede any practical difficulty. Both in the analyzed production and in the most recent sources on the subject, resistance to the division of decision-making power appears as a central obstacle. Managers

accustomed to a vertical model tend to interpret the participation of families as a threat to their authority, not as a strengthening of the school (Siqueira, 2025). This resistance is rarely declared; it manifests itself in a subtle way, in meetings organized to inform and not to deliberate, or in advice that exists on paper, but do not meet to decide anything relevant.

The second barrier is the absence of training. Conducting participatory processes is a competence that needs to be learned, and it is not guaranteed by the initial training of teachers and managers. Knowing how to listen, mediate conflicts, deal with disagreements and build consensus requires specific preparation that, according to the literature, is usually insufficient or non-existent (FRANCE, 2025). Without this preparation, even the well-intentioned manager tends to reproduce the practices he knows, which are generally authoritarian.

A third barrier is material and organizational. Meetings scheduled in commercial hours exclude families who work; the lack of adequate spaces and time for articulation with the community transforms participation into extra task, accumulated on already overloaded professionals. Sobral (2023), when investigating the participative construction of the relationship between school and family, shows that the approach fails when it depends only on the individual effort of some educators, without institutional support. Participation, in order to sustain itself, needs to be included in the school's routine and budget, and not in the personal disposition of those who are willing to do it in their spare hours.

Finally, there is a less visible but decisive barrier: the history of disagreements that marks the relationship. Families that are only called to school to hear complaints about their children develop, understandably, a relationship of avoidance. The school, in turn, interprets this distance as disinterest, when it is often the result of previous experiences of embarrassment. Breaking this cycle of mutual distrust is perhaps the most difficult challenge, because it is not solved by norms, but by the patient reconstruction of the bond.

Once the barriers are identified, the literature points to paths. The most recurrent and most valued mechanism is the school board. When active and well-structured, the council functions as a legitimate space for deliberation, social control and mediation of interests, bringing together managers, teachers, employees, families and students around the decisions that affect the school. The critical point, highlighted by the sources, is that the mere formal existence of the council is not enough: empty instances, created only to meet legal requirements, lose their transforming potential and become symbolic spaces without real force (Siqueira, 2025). For the council to fulfill its function, its members need to be formed and understand its political and pedagogical role.

A second mechanism is the creation of permanent spaces for dialogue and listening, which are not confused with the punctual meeting of delivery of newsletters. It is about establishing regular times when families can express opinions, propose improvements and be heard before and not after decisions are made. Qualified listening, in this sense, is more than a technique: it is an ethical gesture that recognizes the other as a legitimate interlocutor and helps to identify real demands, preventing the school from planning from assumptions about what the community wants or needs.

Transparency is an essential third element. When the decision criteria are clear and the information circulates, trust is built without which no participation is sustained. Families who understand how and why decisions are made tend to adhere to them, even when they disagree; on the contrary, opaque decisions feed suspicion and resistance. The accountability, therefore, is not a favor that the school does to the community, but a condition of democratic management.

It is also worth highlighting the role of digital technologies as allies, with reservations. Communication platforms and message applications expand the range of information and facilitate contact with families who cannot attend in person. However, the literature warns that these tools need to be used in an inclusive way, under the penalty of deepening the digital exclusion of those who do not have access to devices or connection. Technology expands the participation of those who can already participate; it does not replace the effort to include those who are on the sidelines.

A particularly sensitive finding concerns the balance between calling the family to co-responsibility and not transferring to it the weight of school problems. Family participation is desirable, but the way it is requested makes all the difference. As Carvalho (2000) warns, policies of parental involvement built from an idealized family model tend to penalize those that do not correspond to this model, converting inequalities of economic and cultural capital into unequal school performances. The school that charges families for a follow-up that many are unable to offer does not democratize; it deepens injustice.

Hence the importance of recognizing the diversity of family configurations. Contemporary families are plural in composition, resources and time availability. A truly participatory management adapts its mechanisms to this diversity, offering multiple forms of involvement rather than requiring a unique standard. Participating can mean attending an assembly, but it can also mean responding to a consultation, integrating a specific working group or contributing to specific knowledge about the territory. What one should not do is treat absence in a format as proof of disinterest.

Authentic co-responsibility, in this sense, is a two-way street. The school cannot demand participation without opening itself to the influence of families; it cannot demand commitment without offering conditions and reception. When the relationship is structured on respect and reciprocity, co-responsibility ceases to be a charge and becomes a shared commitment, assumed because it makes sense to all involved.

The last axis brings together the effects attributed to the effective participation of families. The literature is convergent by associating the approach between school and family with improvements in the institutional climate. When dialogue is established, distrust is reduced, conflicts are treated more transparently and an environment is created in which everyone feels responsible for the success of students. This climate of cooperation, in turn, reflects on learning: students who perceive coherence between what the school and the family expect from them find a firmer ground to develop.

There are also effects on permanence. The participation of families has been related to the reduction of evasion and repetence, especially in contexts of greater social vulnerability. When the guardians closely follow the school trajectory and feel part of the institution, the probability of supporting the continuity of the studies in times of difficulty increases. In these cases, the link with the school acts as a protective factor against abandonment.

However, interpretative sobriety should be maintained. The participation of families is not a magic formula that alone solves educational problems. It acts together with other factors (appropriate funding, teacher training, working conditions, consistent public policies). To attribute to family participation a power that it does not have would be to repeat, in another key, the mistake of transferring to the family responsibilities that are of the State and the school. What the literature supports is more accurate and more modest: the effective participation of families is a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for the construction of a democratic and quality school.

The four axes together make up a coherent framework. The barriers explain why participation so often fails; the mechanisms indicate how to make it possible; co-responsibility without culpability establishes the criterion of justice that should guide it; and the effects reveal what is at stake. The relationship between school and family, seen through this lens, ceases to be an appendix to school management and reveals itself as one of its cores, perhaps the most demanding, because it involves rebuilding trust and sharing power.

Final Considerations

This article started from the question about how the relationship between school and family can be an effective axis of participatory management. The path made allows us to answer that this relationship has, in fact, structuring potential, but that it only takes place when participation goes beyond the formal plan and becomes a real decision-sharing. Treating the family as a subject, and not as a recipient of communications, is the first condition of this transformation.

The findings indicate that the main obstacles are not technical, but cultural and structural: resistance to the division of power, lack of training for participation, inadequate material conditions and the history of disagreements that keep families away from school. Overcoming these obstacles does not happen by decree. It depends on active school councils, permanent listening spaces, transparency in decisions and, above all, an institutional stance willing to recognize the diversity of families without converting them into an exclusion.

One point deserves final emphasis. The participative construction between school and family walks on a delicate line, between calling co-responsibility and not blaming. Summoning the family is legitimate and necessary; transferring to it the weight of the problems that lie with the State and the school is unfair and counterproductive. The democratic management that is intended to be emancipating clearly distinguishes one thing from the other: it invites without charging the impossible, and shares responsibilities by offering, on the other hand, conditions and reception.

As a contribution, the study organizes, around four axes, a knowledge that usually appears dispersed, and offers managers and educators a framework of reference to rethink their practices. However, the limits of a literature review, which dialogues with the already written one without producing primary data, are recognized. Therefore, it is suggested that future research listen directly to families, investigate concrete experiences of school councils and examine, in different contexts, what makes participation prosper or fade. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for participatory management to cease to be an enunciated principle and become a practice lived in the everyday life of schools.

References

BRAZIL. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Brazil of 1988. Brasília, DF: Senate, 1988.

BRAZIL. Law number 8,069, July 13, 1990. It provides for the Statute of Children and Adolescents and gives other measures. Diário Oficial da União: section 1, Brasília, DF, 16 Jul. 1990.

BRAZIL. Law no. 9,394 of December 20, 1996. It establishes the guidelines and bases of national education. Diário Oficial da União: section 1, Brasília, DF, 23 Dec. 1996.

BRAZIL. Law No. 13,005 of 25 June 2014. Approves the National Education Plan – PNE and makes other arrangements. Diário Oficial da União: section 1, Brasília, DF, 26 Jun. 2014.

CARVALHO, Maria Eulina Pessoa de. Family-school relationships and their gender implications. Cadernos de Pesquisa, São Paulo, n. 110, p. 143-155, 2000.

Dessen, Maria Auxiliadora; POLONIA, Ana da Costa. Family and school as contexts of human development. Paidea (Ribeirão Preto), v. 17. No. 36, p. 21-32, 2007.

FRANCE, Flávia Soares Roza de. Participative management in schools: challenges and possibilities. Arace magazine, São José dos Pinhais, v. 7th, n. 4, p. 17978-17992, 2025.

LIBANEO, José Carlos. School organization and management: theory and practice. 6. ed. Rev. and ampl. São Paulo: Heccus, 2013.

LÜCK, Heloisa. Participative school management. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2011. (Management Book Series).

PARO, Vitor Henrique. Democratic management of public school. São Paulo: Attica, 1997.

PARO, Vitor Henrique. Quality of education: the contribution of parents. São Paulo: Shaman, 2000.

POLONIA, Ana da Costa; DESSEN, Maria Auxiliadora. In search of an understanding of the relationships between family and school. School and Educational Psychology, v. 9, no. 2, p. 303-312, 2005.

SARAIVA-JUNGES, Lisiane Alvim; WAGNER, Adriana. Studies on the family-school relationship in Brazil: a systematic review. Education (PUCRS), Porto Alegre, v. 39, p. s114-s124, 2016.

SIQUEIRA, Gisele da Conceição Tavares Vargas de. Participative school management: consolidation of democracy and ethics in the school unit. International Seven Multidisciplinary Journal, São José dos Pinhais, v. 4, n. 4, p. 126-137, jul./ago. 2025.

Sobral, Alexandra Alves. The relationship between school and family: challenges and possibilities for a participatory construction. 2023. Dissertation (Professional Master in Education: Training of Trainers) – Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2023.

SZYMANSKI, Heloisa. The family/school relationship: challenges and perspectives. 2. ed. Brasília: Liber Livro, 2009.