

International Journal of Human Sciences Research

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND NORMATIVE PROVISIONS IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Felipe de Jesús Perales Mejía

National Pedagogical University

Torreon, Coahuila

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9051-546X>

Acceptance date: 18/10/2024

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



Abstract: The contribution is a case study conducted in a public elementary school in Mexico, more than two decades after the Federal Government promoted a renewed social participation in education with various regulations for basic education institutions. The research perspective in which the study was conducted is qualitative, from an ethnographic perspective. The purpose of the study was to document the way in which normative provisions are re-contextualized by social agents. The research is consistent with others that have studied school culture; it argues the need to continue documenting and recreating narratively what happens in educational institutions, taking distance from the proposals developed in other contexts, in order to build others that come closer to the life worlds of social agents.

Keywords: Basic Education, Management, Social Participation.

INTRODUCTION

Social participation is considered by some researchers as an attempt by Latin American governments to modernize their respective educational systems. In this, governments were following the recommendations of international organizations dealing with technical and financial matters. The adoption of the recommendations had as a background the reconfiguration of the traditional relations of the State with society, due to the emergence of a new actor in the process of economic globalization: the market (Torres, 2006).

In the Mexican educational system, as in other Latin American countries (Díaz, Alfaro, Calderón and Álvarez, 2010), social participation in education was one of the axes of educational reform in the 1990s, concretized with the signing of the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic

Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública [Sep], 1992). At present, it is seen as a necessity to strengthen the management capacity and autonomy of schools. Its purpose is to create the conditions for students, former students, teachers, principals, parents and other social agents to become involved in the solution of problems faced by schools (Sep, 1993).

However, the participation of parents in schools has deep historical roots; they have always taken part in school affairs. Their participation began when elementary schools were institutionalized with the creation of educational systems in the 19th century, reaching the creation of associations during the 20th century, such as the Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia for private Catholic schools and, by presidential decree of the Mexican State, the Asociación Nacional de Padres de Familia (García, 2002).

In this dimension, parents have taken part in the life of schools in a regulated manner through various mechanisms¹, according to their interests, needs, expectations and worldviews of what the educational process should be. More often than not, their participation is induced, seduced or forced by the policies implemented by the State, in the form of implicit or explicit courses of action, seeking to comply with the goals set by government plans (Flores, 2011).

Social participation, as a government strategy and practice, has implied implementing a series of normative devices for basic education institutions. Some of these are: the General Education Law, which demands the establishment of Social Participation Councils (Sep, 1993); agreement 280, which defines the general guidelines to which the Constitution and Operation of the Social Participation School Councils will be adjusted (Sep, 2000); agreement 535, which specifies the general

1. Such as the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations created in 1929, the Regulation for the Constitution and Operation of Parents' Associations in schools under the Ministry of Public Education of 1949 or, in recent history, the Regulation of Parents' Associations (Sep, 1980).

guidelines for their operation (Diario Oficial de la Federación [Dof,] 2009), agreement 717 (Dof, 2014), among others.

In this historical context, the paper presented here aims to present a narrative approach to the way in which the normative dispositions, previously enunciated, are concretized by the social agents - principal, parents and teachers - making use of the practical sense in their various ways of life within an elementary school (Bourdieu, 2002).

METHOD

The purpose of the research was to document the way in which social participation takes shape in an elementary school located in the city of Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico. The case study is situated in the institutional dimension, carried out during two school years. The case focuses on the particularity of the social generality in which social participation policies are promoted in elementary schools. Some of the guiding questions were: How do teachers, principals and parents participate in the constitution of the Social Participation Councils? What actions do teachers and principals carry out in the administrative area to comply with the provisions of the Ministry of Public Education? At the time the research was conducted, the school had a principal, a released assistant principal, twelve teachers, three support teachers (English, art education and physical education) and two principals. Of the twelve teachers, eight have studied basic normal and bachelor's degrees at the National Pedagogical University; in addition, two have studied at the higher normal and two are studying for a master's degree.

The perspective in which the research was conducted was qualitative, with ethnographic orientation (Rockwell, 2009). Research techniques and resources characteristic of this tradition were used: participant observation,

2. In the correlate, contextual quotations from participant observation are identified with the initials RO, followed by the day, month and year. Interviews with the initial E, the day, month and year.

interviews, surveys, documents from the institution's archives and school supervision.²

Initially, the analysis of the observation and interview records was carried out using descriptive matrices to identify the social categories (Coffey and Atkinson, 2003), which as plexuses of meaning denote the participants' meanings. Subsequently, they were placed in the historical framework in which social participation is promoted through diverse devices (Bertely, 2000).

The documentation of how school actors are involved in social participation allowed us to know what is happening in the school in order to reconstruct, as a correlate, how the normative dispositions established for the constitution of the School Council are being put into practice.

Social participation in the school where the study was conducted was carried out with the presence of some parents who, voluntarily or obligatorily, expressed criticisms and proposals to face the difficulties that arise in the daily life of the school.

RESULTS

As prescribed by Article 69 of the General Education Law (Sep, 1993):

“The school authority shall ensure that in each public basic education school there is a school council for social participation, made up of parents and representatives of their associations, teachers and representatives of their union organizations, who will represent the labor interests of workers, school directors, former students, as well as other members of the community interested in the development of the school itself” (p.28).

Agreement 535 establishes the actions to constitute the School Social Participation Councils and sets the calendar of activities in four sessions of the members and three as-

semblies with the community. The activities correspond to what is called the functional cycle, which comprises three stages: formation, management, transparency and accountability (Sep, 2010).

For the formation of the councils, the provisions were sent to the schools through the administrative structure of the Secretary of Education in the State, as is tradition, in a hierarchical manner: level coordination - sector head - supervision - school management.

The school administration is the authorized body to convene and comply with the provisions: to form the board of directors of the Parents' Association³ and the School Council for Social Participation. However, the principal usually finds it difficult to form both bodies, especially because it implies the attendance of parents. *"The Parents' Society has little functionality. It is always the same: it is difficult to form the board of directors because no one wants to participate"* (E-090611).

According to the results of a survey, the low participation of parents is due to the fact that at the time the meetings of both the School Council of Social Participation and the Parents' Association are held, they are at work and a lack of work means a reduction in their salary. For this reason, the meetings are attended by between 35 and 40 parents out of a total of 200, regardless of the prior information they must have in order to participate in an informed manner in the school assemblies.

In the school where the study was conducted, in the meetings held to form both the Parents' Association and the School Council for Social Participation, the principal was accompanied by some members of both school bodies. She began the meeting by explaining the reasons for the meeting and the importance of parental participation. At

the meeting for the formation of the School Council, the principal explained the functions that the members would assume in this school body, the problems faced by the school and emphasized the need for them to participate with proposals or self-proposals for its integration.

However, upon perceiving that the parents had no intention of holding any office, he continued the meeting with an optimistic attitude in order to persuasively engage the attendees. It should be taken into account that, as established in Article 20 of Agreement 280 (Sep, 2000): "The school councils for social participation in education will be formed by a presiding councilor and up to fifteen councilors. A technical secretary will be appointed by majority vote from among the members of each school council (p.4). In total, 17 people, which, added to the 10 members of the Parents' Association, makes 27 members that make up, in theory, the school bodies. Therefore, the effort that the principal had to make to achieve the participation of parents was not insignificant. *"The formation of the School Council of Social Participation seeks a way to have some help, some benefit. There are those who can do it. I don't want to say who, but I'm already looking at them... Come on, let's go! Cheer up, anyone? If not, we're going to have to do it as a volunteer by force. Would you, madam, help us?"* (RO-230911).

At first, the principal informed the parents about the benefits obtained by complying administratively with the integration of the School Council of Social Participation, such as receiving the support provided by the Ministry of Public Education and the State Government ("Escuelas al 100", "Desayunos Escolares", etc.). However, his speech did not succeed in convincing the attendees to

3. The election, according to Article 11 of the aforementioned regulations, is scheduled for the first fifteen days following the beginning of the school year, and thereafter, ordinary sessions are held every two months, and extraordinary sessions are held when the members are called by the president. Article 29 establishes the unipersonal positions of President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and six members, a total of ten (Dof, 1980).

nominate themselves or propose themselves as candidates to occupy any position in the council, so he directly appointed the people he had previously talked to.

Once the School Council was formed, he asked the members to sign the form of the constitutive act in order to comply with the administrative requirement in due time and form. Subsequently, she invited the attendees to join the different committees for food, safety, reading, etc., in order to attend to the needs and priorities of the students and the school's infrastructure. It should be noted that, during that school year, the principal served as President Councilor, so that the proposals made by the other members would require her authorization.

In this dimension, the constitution of the School Council for Social Participation in this school is administrative rather than participatory; it complies in time and form with the provisions issued by the school authorities, without the voluntary involvement of parents.

DUAL REPRESENTATION

According to the minutes of the 2012-2013 school year, in September, the same parents held 50% of the positions in both the Parents' Association and the School Council for Social Participation. That is to say, there was a double representation in both school bodies, because participating in the school requires time and the practical way for the principal to do so is to propose immediate solutions so that the educational authorities do not sanction her, but also to avoid possible conflicts between the members of both school bodies, regardless of the fact that not all parents participate, only a few of them.

HEALTHY EATING

In order for teachers to have economic support to help them with the expenses incurred in the development of school activities, there is a stall where some products are sold and the profits obtained are shared with the school management to meet the needs generated in the school (E-080911).

The items offered in the stall do not reflect what is promoted by the national campaigns implemented by the Ministry of Public Education for *Healthy Eating*. The items sold are fried foods, candy and soft drinks. We can notice how the campaigns not only have to confront the eating habits of the general population, already rooted in the same culture, but also the school teachers themselves. The criterion that guides the choice of products for the store is to have higher sales and, therefore, higher profits. This is logical, if one considers that the dividends are distributed among the teachers and the school management to meet various needs.

However, since the school organized the School Council Committee to promote Healthy Eating, they offered an alternative menu, going from classroom to classroom, at a cost of ten pesos to students who were interested in buying it (RO-081012).

When parents offered healthy products, sales of other foods declined. As a result, the income of teachers and managers also decreased. However, this was not a cause for concern, since the principal supported the proposal and was willing to allow parents to sell their products in the classrooms during school hours, even though this type of activity would be a distraction for the students. This was of no importance to teachers, principals or parents.

Other aspects of "disinterested interest" include attention to students' health problems. For example, the administration authorizes the visit of representatives of health institutions to identify students with overweight and obesity problems or summons parents to answer surveys.

This may seem contradictory to the observer who is not familiar with the daily life of the school because, on the one hand, parents are summoned by representatives of the health sector (supported by the principal) to obtain information about their lifestyle and diet. On the other hand, during breaks, students are allowed to consume products that are unlikely to help them control their weight. However, daily life in schools and classrooms, as documented by Philip W. Jackson (1992) and Francois Dubet and Danilo Martuccelli (1998), has its own logic, most of the time not written in the curriculum prescribed by the administration, but acquires its practical meaning, based on the contingencies and interests of social agents.

DISCUSSION

More than two decades ago, the State promoted a renewal of social participation in basic education. To this end, it created collegiate bodies and enacted laws, agreements and guidelines with the aim of transforming the subjectivity of social agents and their practices. According to what was documented in this case study, social agents do not orient themselves by following punctually prescribed actions, but through practical sense (Bourdieu 1988, 2002), which do not always reflect the proposal of what the State was looking for with the laws, agreements and guidelines, but in the contingency and interests of the social actors.

The study coincides with others that have studied school culture and reveals the need to continue documenting and narratively recreating what happens in educational institutions (Canales, 2006; Estrada, 2009; Perales, 2013, 2014 and 2015) in order to understand the system of relationships that guides them. Likewise, as Ezpeleta (2004) points out, in the sense that the school is an institution permeated by multiple

processes in which educational innovations implemented from the technical rationality are circumscribed to their own logics, without considering other processes that allow their articulation.

CONCLUSIONS

From the practical sense and the reasons that guide it, it is possible to understand the double game of the representatives of the Parents' Association and the School Council of Social Participation. One can understand the "disinterested interest" in accessing, remaining and being in the school with a particular status. We also perceive the practical way in which the principal intends to control the members of both organizations. Finally, it is possible to understand the crossed interests in the administration of the school store and the way in which the healthy food menu is offered to the students, even at the cost of invading the classrooms and taking time away from teaching.

One of the strengths of the study is to account for the way in which the normative dispositions are concretized in a given school and social context through the practical reasons of the social agents, crossed by multiple processes and interests, different from the context in which they are designed, devised, fantasized and longed for as something that is expected to happen in schools to transform the practices and culture of the social agents. Perhaps it may share similar patterns in the way in which the School Councils of Social Participation are constituted in other schools, in the time and formats established by the educational authorities, with the purpose of complying with administrative dispositions, with the involvement of the participants being far away because the practical reasons guide the sense of their actions. However, it shows the particularity of social generality in the way in which policies and devices that intend to promote social participation are implemented.

However, the limitation of the study is the impossibility of generalizing the results as a representative sample of what happens in other schools, because it is a case study. That is, it is only an evidence that shows the conditions of possibility in which the technical decisions that aim to modify the culture of social participation are materialized.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the processes of re-contextualization in which they take place, taking into account the interests and the practical sense of the agents involved, which are accepted as normal as they are part of the daily life of the institutions.

What has been documented may allow readers, decision-makers and educational authorities to take a step back and reconsider the proposals of international organizations that deal with technical and financial matters, from a technical rationality, in order to build others that touch more on the social agents and their life worlds, which are oriented by practical reasons rather than by normative provisions, constituting participatory subjectivities that make possible the construction of a citizenship committed to the training processes.

REFERENCES

Bertely, M. (2000) *Conociendo nuestras escuelas*. México: Paidós.

Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Cosas dichas*. Buenos Aires, Gedisa.

_____. (2002). *Razones prácticas. Sobre la teoría de la acción*. Barcelona: Anagrama.

Canales, S.A. (2006). La participación social en educación: un dilema por resolver. *Perfiles Educativos*.28(113), 62-80. Recuperado de <http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/132/13211304.pdf>

Coffey, A. y Atkinson, P. (2003). *Encontrarle sentido a los datos cualitativos. Estrategias complementarias de investigación*. Colombia: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia.

Díaz, B. C., Alfaro, P.B., Calderón, A. y Álvarez L.N. (2010). Los protagonistas de los Consejos Educativos Institucionales: Tensiones y Dilemas de la Participación en la Gestión de la Escuela Pública. En Monográfico: La participación de la Comunidad en la Mejora de la Escuela. *Revista iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficiencia y Cambio en Educación*. 8(3), 31-49. Recuperado de <http://www.rinace.net/reice/numeros/vol8num3.htm>

Dubet, F y Martucceli, D. (1998). *En La Escuela. Sociología de la experiencia escolar*. España: Losada.

Diario Oficial de la Federación [Dof]. (1993, julio13). Ley General de Educación. Última reforma 10-06-2013. Recuperado de http://www.sep.gob.mx/work/models/sep1/Resource/558c2c24-0b12-4676-ad90-8ab78086b184/ley_general_educacion.pdf

_____. (1980, febrero 4). *Reglamento de Asociaciones de Padres de Familia*. Recuperado de http://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=4851086&fecha=02/04/1980

_____.(2010, junio 8). *Acuerdo 535 por el que se emiten los Lineamientos Generales para la Operación de los Consejos Escolares de Participación Social*. México: Diario Oficial de la Federación.

_____.(2014, marzo 7). *Acuerdo 717, por el que se emiten los lineamientos para formular los programas de Gestión Escolar*. México: Diario Oficial de la Federación.

Estrada, M. (2008). La participación social en educación: Hacia una comunidad escolar en Las Margaritas, Chiapas. *Revista Interamericana de Educación para la Democracia*. 1(2), 186-204. Recuperado de <http://www.dhl.hegoa.ehu.es/ficheros/0000/0529/Participaci.pdf>

Ezpeleta, M. (2004). *Innovaciones educativas. Reflexiones sobre los contextos en su implementación*. Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa. México; Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa, 9(21), 403-424. Recuperado de <https://www.comie.org.mx/revista/v2018/rmie/index.php/nrmie/article/view/853/853>

Flores, P. (2011.3) *Análisis de política educativa. Un nuevo impulso*. Revista Mexicana de investigación Educativa. Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa. 16(50), 687-698. Recuperado de <https://www.comie.org.mx/revista/v2018/rmie/index.php/nrmie/article/view/390/390>

García, A. (2002), La participación de los padres de familia en educación, siglos XIX y XX. En, *directorío de historia de la educación en México* (Luz Elena Galván Coordinadora). Recuperado de http://biblioweb.tic.unam.mx/diccionario/html/articulos/sec_9.htm

Jackson W. P. (1992). *La vida en las aulas*. Madrid: Morata.

Perales, M. F. (2013). *Disposiciones y Posiciones en la Participación Social*. Memoria Electrónica del XII Congreso Nacional de Investigación Educativa. México: Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa. Recuperado de <http://www.comie.org.mx/congreso/memoriaelectronica/v12/doc/0092.pdf>

_____. (2014). *La participación social en educación: entre el habitus comunitario y la obligación administrativa*. Cpu-e Revista de Investigación Educativa 8, 86-119. Recuperado de <http://cpue.uv.mx/index.php/cpue/article/view/967>

_____. (2015). *Tensiones de la Participación Social en una Escuela Primaria*. Memoria Electrónica del XIII Congreso Nacional de Investigación Educativa. México. Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa. Recuperado de <http://www.comie.org.mx/congreso/memoriaelectronica/v13/doc/1796.pdf>

Rockwell, E. (2009). *La experiencia etnográfica. Historia y cultura en los procesos educativos*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.

Secretaría de Educación Pública [Sep.]. (1992). *Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica*. México: Secretaría de Educación Pública.

_____. (1993). *Ley General de Educación*. México: Secretaría de Educación Pública.

_____. (2000). *Acuerdo 280 por el que se establecen los Lineamientos Generales a los que se ajustarán la constitución y el funcionamiento de los Consejos de Participación Social en la Educación*. México Secretaría de Educación Pública. http://normatecainterna.sep.gob.mx/work/models/normateca/Resource/248/1/images/acuerdo_280_lineamientos_constitucion_funcionamiento_participacion_social.pdf

_____. (2010). *Acuerdo 535 por el que se emiten los Lineamientos Generales para la Operación de los Consejos Escolares de Participación Social*. Diario Oficial de la Federación, 6, México, 2010.

Torres, R. M. (2006). *Participación ciudadana y educación: Una mirada amplia y 20 experiencias en América Latina*. Documento encargado por la Unidad de Desarrollo Social y Educación (UDSE). Recuperado de : http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/partnership/oea_document.pdf