SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND PROMOTION OF STUDENT PROTAGONISM

GESTÃO ESCOLAR E PROMOÇÃO DO PROTAGONISMO ESTUDANTIL

GESTIÓN ESCOLAR Y FOMENTO DEL PROTAGONISMO DE ESTUDIANTES

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ABSTRACT: The objective that guides this text is to analyze the relationship between school and democracy, focusing on school organization. The presence of the Young Protagonists Project was problematized, as a demand for the Full Time Education Program of Pernambuco amid the expansion of reference schools in secondary education. The micropolitical approach supported the qualitative analysis of real schools through a case study with a view to building new citizenships, structurally inclusive, of collective subjects around values, with a view to reducing marginalities. Among the results, the dichotomy between the determinations of the macro policy emanated by the educational system and the instituting potential of the schools is pointed out, guided by the figure of the manager. It is concluded that the school distances the student more and more from learning an authentic democracy, during a narrative forged to respond to legal-formal determinations to promote student protagonism.


RESUMEN: El objetivo que guía este texto es analizar la relación entre escuela y democracia, centrándose en la organización escolar. Se problematizó la presencia del Proyecto Jóvenes Protagonistas, como una demanda del Programa de Educación de Tiempo Completo de Pernambuco en medio de la expansión de las Escuelas de Referencia en la Educación Secundaria. El enfoque micropolítico apoyó el análisis cualitativo de escuelas reales a través de un estudio de caso con miras a la construcción de nuevas ciudadanías, estructuralmente inclusivas, de sujetos colectivos en torno a los valores, con miras a la reducción de las marginalidades. Entre los resultados, se señala la dicotomía entre las determinaciones de la macropolítica emanada del sistema educativo y el potencial instituyente de las escuelas, orientadas por la figura del gestor. Se concluye que la escuela aleja cada vez más al estudiante del aprendizaje de una auténtica democracia, en medio de una narrativa forjada para responder a determinaciones jurídico-formales de promover el protagonismo estudiantil.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, several policies, supported by declarations of child and adolescent political participation as a right of citizenship (Brasil, 1990; UNICEF, 1989), have been implemented in the perspective of making these subjects effective in public decision-making spaces (Amaral, 2022; Brasil, 2016), in school micropolitics (Pernambuco, 2002, 2008) and in the constitution of policies whose recipients are, as a priority, children and adolescents (Botler; Nascimento, 2023).

In this sense, participation rights “entrust children with the right to be heard and consulted, to express themselves and give their opinion freely, to have access to information and to decide for their own benefit” (Veiga; Ferreira, 2017, p. 8). Although its effectiveness is still a horizon and a challenge (Sarmento; Fernandes; Tomás, 2007), since the foundations of Brazilian society are backed by authoritarianism and adult-centrism, several initiatives have been consolidated and imprinted a reordering of things. The Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua – MNMMR [National Movement of Street Boys and Girls] of the 1980s, for example, was an important vector of democratic qualification in the country (Clemente, 2018; Nascimento, 2020), demanding the recognition of human rights, which ended up focusing on the approval of article 227 of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution (Brasil, 1988) and, subsequently, of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent – Law no. 8.069, of July 13, 1990 (Brasil, 1990).

Since then, several national and local initiatives have generated demands for the active participation of children and adolescents in the constitution of national policies (Brasil, 2017; Pernambuco, 2018), in addition to improving participatory mechanisms in school management, with experiences and experiments sometimes linked movements for the defense and promotion of children’s rights, sometimes as policies managed by the State, as well as spontaneous demands such as actions to occupy schools in 2016.

In order to understand how this state of affairs unfolds in the school routine, we focus the debate on micropolitics, that is, on how the real school affects education policies that determine the norms for the development of activities that promote democratic spaces, of effective student participation, through problematization. However, when implementing such policies, in the local context, schools interpret these norms, giving them unique meaning and action, through a critical and meaningful approach (Botler, 2004).
In view of this, we present a general objective to analyze the potentialities of the school in promoting student protagonism, focusing on school management and organization. Therefore, on the one hand, the normative dimensions, political tensions, and contradictions of student participation and protagonism implemented as government strategies for the qualification of education, democracy, and fair school in the Escolas de Referência em Ensino Médio (EREM) [Secondary Education Reference Schools] are investigated. On the other hand, we seek to reveal, through the vocalization of school managers, the way in which they perceive, experience, and promote such policies and reverberate them in the school micropolitics.

This paper explores the central role of school management in promoting student protagonism engendered in the context of neoliberal education policies, based on data from an exploratory investigation whose theme addresses the relationship between school and democracy as a possibility for secondary education students to experience active citizenship. We collected data from two EREMs in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, through semi-structured interviews and documentary research, analyzing them based on Categorical Content Analysis (Bardin, 1977). One of the schools in question is located in the Mata Norte Development Region, renowned for its quality and which has received successive innovation awards; the other school is located on the outskirts of Recife, whose neighborhood presents various survival difficulties derived from social and educational inequality. In both, however, the Projeto de Jovens Protagonistas [Young Protagonists Project] has been implemented, as required by the Full-Time Education Program of Pernambuco (Pernambuco, 2008).

We will begin our argument by emphasizing the central and fundamental premise that, even as teenagers, students at this stage of education are recognized as full subjects of political rights, resulting in the declared guarantee of exercising an active and meaningful participation in school life. Next, we will approach the theme of student participation and protagonism, contextualizing it within the field of educational studies, exploring the policies and practices that govern the school environment and the causalities of the full-time school model in peripheral communities (urban and rural). Finally, we will dedicate an analysis on the vocalization of school managers on the potential of exercising student protagonism reverberated as political action by students within the EREMs under study. With this, we shall understand how these dynamics are manifested with a view to building new citizenships, structurally inclusive, around values, in the perspective of reducing marginalities.
Protagonism and participation as rights and the right to participation and protagonism

Although we do not intend to make an etymological description of the term, the word “protagonist” is linked to the performing arts or the military order, connecting to the main character or the combatant who takes the lead on the battlefields (Botler; Nascimento, 2023). In both cases, therefore, they designate the subject which plays a fundamental role, taking the lead, making important decisions, and exerting significant influence over the other subjects, the events, or processes in question.

This characterization, in analogy, became linked to political training activities in the field of non-formal education, especially of adolescents from the popular classes, in Brazil, since the 1990s – sometimes confused as a method, other times as a result of the pedagogical action. Souza (2009, p. 3) points out that “the emergence of the statement, however, was preceded by the production, since the 1980s, of a discourse on youth participation”. This period is marked by the beginning of the affirmation of child and adolescent citizenship, characterized by Porfírio (2013) as an Era of Rights, especially marked by a set of internal and external regulatory frameworks that will guarantee parity of rights between adults and the child and adolescent population and, therefore, their citizenships.

Examples of this regulation are the Federal Constitution of 1988, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, internally in the country, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), of 1989, externally. These declarations of rights not only proclaimed the active participation of social actors as guiding elements for their effectiveness, but also included the claims of children and adolescents themselves as norms. Indeed, the free exercise of participation in decision structures is capable of influencing decision-making and, therefore, is characterized as a practice of protagonism.

Still, despite a clear definition, literature points out that there are several meanings for the term “protagonism” and divergences among the authors (Ferretti; Zibas; Tartuce, 2004), but we agree with what Pires and Branco (2007, p. 312) affirm:

Despite the controversy regarding the use of the terms participation and protagonism, there seem to be two obvious advantages regarding the preferential use of the word participation. The first refers to the ease of use of the word by children, since, in a first analysis, the word participation is a term commonly used in Portuguese. The second advantage refers to the greater ease of explaining what participation (with the meaning of being a protagonist) is for children, in the context of programs or campaigns that aim to promote their involvement in decision-making processes for social transformations (Pires; Branco, 2007, p. 312).
As it is possible to derive from the argument, we clarify that in its strict sense, they can be understood as synonyms, mainly because the legislation for the rights of children adopts the term “participation”. And so that these rights are safeguarded, mechanisms were created, and norms established to ensure the political participation of this age group in state and non-state institutions, just as it happens in education policies.

The 1988 Brazilian Constitution guides the political life of citizens based on participation, including direct participation in State acts, enabling the effective exercise of social control, with a view to defending collective interests. In this sense, giving meaning to social protagonism, understanding that it is not enough to claim products and/or services, but to advance in decision-making in the implementation of policies (Nascimento, 2020, p. 162).

The insertion of social protagonism (student/youth) as a government action, in this sense, allows us to understand it as a type of incidence/participation in the social context to respond to real problems in which the citizen is active in decision-making. In addition, the attainment of citizenship under the terms of the Constitution centrally derives from the active participation of social actors (Carvalho, 2021), intertwining protagonism and the achievement of the country’s objectives. Therefore, it aims to strengthen democracy itself, as warned by UNICEF (2002, p. 44), that “this participation implies a permanent process in which what should prevail is not an isolated opinion, either of the adolescent or the adult, but the result of different views accommodated in a consensus built with respect for both”.

Thus, within the scope of child and adolescent rights, backed by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent – Law no. 8.069/1990 –, all rights are guided by what is announced in the first six articles of this legislation, so that they are assured “by law or by other means, all opportunities and facilities, in order to provide them with physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development, in conditions of freedom and dignity” (Brasil, 1990, Art. 3rd). In turn, the right to freedom is stated in Art. 16 as the possibility of issuing: “II - opinion and expression; (...) V - participate in family and community life, without discrimination; VI - participate in political life” (Brasil, 1990, Art. 16th).

It is observed that the legislation on the rights of children and adolescents establishes the right to legitimate active participation in society and other institutions or bodies of state administration. Its effectiveness is based on public policies aimed at this end, such as the establishment of participation in the Conferences on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (Brasil, 2017), which will define public policies in this area, but also in the order of educational...
micropolitics (in school). In the latter case, students have been encouraged to participate actively, following the example of what is established in the Law of the State of Pernambuco that designates the Integral Protection of students or in the Law that creates the Full-Time Education Program, as we will highlight in the next section.

**Student participation and protagonism: citizenship, tutorship and marginalization**

Besides occupying an important place for the consolidation of citizenship, student participation has been centrally established when it comes to various education policies, especially after it was ensured as one of the rights of education for the family and for the students themselves (Ferreira, 2010). This occurs, on the one hand, through the consolidation of educational democracy proposed by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent – Law no. 8.069/1990 –, which, in addition to ensuring that all children of school age could demand seats in the basic education network (Nascimento; Marques, 2021), establishes child and adolescent participation as a right to education and citizenship.

In these terms, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, when establishing the announcement of the right to education, in line with Art. 205 of the 1988 Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988), declares in its Art. 53 that “children and adolescents have the right to education, aiming at their full development, preparation for the exercise of citizenship and qualification for work” (Brasil, 1990, emphasis added). It postulates, therefore, that the school is the privileged space to circumscribe the practice of citizenship.

Additionally, the announcing formula of this right is presented in order to prioritize the objectives of the educational action, establishing the primacy of civic life to the experiences of the world of work (Nascimento, 2020). Still in relation to the preparation for the exercise of citizenship advocated here, it is expected a comprehensive education of children and adolescents that introduces them to a task of co-constructing their own humanization and that they are initiated in the public world (Arendt, 2009), by participating in the common and inherent affairs of the community. Due to that, it presents, among the set of education rights, the collective participation of learners in item IV of Art. 53, affirming the “organization and participation in student entities” (Brasil, 1990).

In addition to the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, Pernambuco established legislation that deals with the Full Protection of students – Law no. 12.280, of November 11, 2002 –, which stipulates ways for their participation in the educational micro field. This is the reason why, in Art. 21, it is stated that “the student’s rights are: I - knowledge and participation
in the Pedagogical Project of the School and the provisions of the Internal Regulations of the School Unit” (Pernambuco, 2002). Art. 22 stipulates that the “student is guaranteed freedom of expression and participation: I - Student Union; II - in the School and Class Councils; III - in educational, artistic-cultural and sports activities” (Pernambuco, 2002). Finally, the Law that creates the Full-Time Education Program in Pernambuco (Pernambuco, 2008) – Complementary Law no. 125, of July 10, 2008 –, also defines student protagonism as a curricular action, establishing the goal of “implementing the Youth Protagonism Project in schools”.

We draw special attention to the dichotomy present in the two local laws that deal with students’ political actions. If, on the one hand, the first stands out as a legislation that seeks the protection of all children and adolescents, ensuring conditions of equality and justice for marginalized and silenced groups, on the other hand, the concept of protagonism projected in the second legislation keeps affinity with the concept of youth entrepreneurship. However, the policies implemented by the States, even by governments, converge in a pendular symbiosis between the logic of social welfare, on the one hand, and neoliberal logic, on the other. With this, it is reinforced that the logic associated with the adopted student participation triggers citizenship development practices and, at the same time, serves as an instrument of political control over students.

With this in mind, Pernambuco’s education policy has sought to promote student protagonism. This is done through two main strategies: valuing student unions, which allow students to self-organize, and encouraging Protagonism Clubs, which seek to develop skills and competencies so that teenagers can assimilate and adopt a market-oriented entrepreneurial attitude.

The classic image of the entrepreneur as someone who carries out his/her projects individually, consolidating relationships of competitiveness and performativity, focusing on a deepening of the neoliberal discourse, is taken into account. That is, it is concluded that education should improve individuals’ skills and abilities, making them more productive, which, on a large scale, could positively influence countries’ economic growth rates.

This conception stems from a deep-rooted culture in public management in which policies are outlined with a strong manifestation of private interests; in the case of education policies, they manifest themselves in a discourse in favor of improving the quality of education whose objective is economic development. Adrião, Croso and Marin (2022, p. 2), characterize it as a “new type of philanthropy” mediated by pacts with state governments, which “make use
of the ideas and values of the corporate world to achieve social impact results – and direct or indirect financial returns”.

The Full-Time Education Program that implements youth protagonism in the EREM of Pernambuco brings this orientation to education policies, having been conceived with the aim of improving planning, monitoring and evaluation instruments, as well as implementing the results-based management standard, through pedagogical and managerial innovations, whose basis is the exercise of citizenship and youth protagonism (Pernambuco, 2008; 2015).

This is how the model assumed in the Youth Protagonism Project is observed, “whose focus is the Young Protagonist and the construction of their Life Project” (ICE⁴, 2021, n.p.), a policy that was also established, in an expanded way, in the Brazilian Common Core State Standards and the New Secondary Education. The implementation of this policy took place through the intervention of a group of businessmen in the administration of Ginásio Pernambucano, in Recife-Pernambuco state, one of the oldest public schools in Brazil, in 2000, and was mirrored as a model for several Brazilian states.

Ginásio Pernambucano was the starting point of the Cause of Youth with the conception of an innovative education model called Escola da Escolha [School of Choice], whose focus is on young people and the construction of their Life Project. After the development of the Model and the consolidation of public policy in Pernambuco, ICE began its expansion with state and municipal Departments of Education in the five Brazilian regions (ICE, 2021, n.p.).

This school was “adopted” by a group of businessmen who determined a pedagogical model aimed at qualifying students for the job market, as a priority, disseminated through the ICE. Protagonism, as one of the purposes of the Full-Time Education Program, is defined by its creators as

[...] appropriating the knowledge of the various organized systems, that is, of the various areas of human knowledge organized in the curriculum. In addition, it requires, as a precondition, appropriation of the basic instruments of reading, writing, mathematics and logical reasoning, which allow the development of comprehension skills (Magalhães, 2008, p. 49).

According to Magalhães’ (2008) definition, it is possible to perceive that in this model, there are characteristics linked to the Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1973). This theory argues that investments in education should focus on improving individuals’ skills and aptitudes, with
a view to making them more productive. Thus, applying it on a large scale, it can have a positive impact on the economic growth rates of the countries.

The establishment of this public-private partnership for the management of the full-time secondary education policy in the state of Pernambuco foresees the creation of the so-called “Protagonism Clubs” and the political formation of the subjects involved in this endeavor, making it possible to extract in its concept an alignment of the same market/neoliberal nature:

The most basic of all ways to be a protagonist in life is to develop the attitude of putting oneself in the world as part of the solution to the problems that exist, both those around us and far from us, it doesn’t matter. What matters here is “caring” about the things that happen and that require solutions. A protagonist believes that he can be part of the solutions, which doesn’t mean one is going to have solutions for everything, of course. But the protagonist is committed and stops saying “Wow, nobody is solving this?” and goes on to say: “Wow/Well, I can contribute to solving this!” (ICE, 2018, p. 8, emphasis added).

Therefore, the need for a flexible and highly qualified workforce is suggested, as per the excerpt above. This conception, as well as the Human Capital Theory, implies that workers must have diversified skills and be able to perform various tasks, resulting in more skilled professionals with greater training compared to the typical worker of the Fordist model. In addition, the excerpt exposes a model of the State’s lack of responsibility in ensuring subjective rights, through a social welfare policy, transferring such responsibilities to civil society. Thus,

[…] transfers to young people and adolescents, individually or in groups, especially to those who are part of the impoverished sectors, the responsibility of, according to the concept of resilience, contributing to overcoming adversity. A currently very visible example, regarding the perversity of the emphasis on this type of protagonism, concerns the processes of insertion and maintenance in the labor market, when responsibility is shifted to individuals (Ferretti; Zibas; Tartuce, 2004, p. 418).

In this perspective, we add that the stimulus to protagonist actions in schools permeated by an ideological current of accountability of the subjects themselves, stimulating entrepreneurship/meritocracy for the preservation of the capitalist economy, ends up triggering practices of control and regulation of society. Therefore, it has repercussions on the control and domination of less wealthy groups and on possible “social uprisings”, through an exercise in biopolitics (Foucault, 2010). It is also necessary to remember that in the idea of meritocracy, systematized in the life project and instituted as a curricular component of the EREMfs, harmful
competition is promoted, making invisible the idea that the asymmetries generated by individual effort, by itself, would lead the student to the success and economic ascendancy.

Life Project is the transposition of market-oriented discourses to schools: reducing the role of the State and letting individuals fight each other to have a place in the shadows. The labor market crises generated by Neoliberalism started to be accounted for by individual efforts. Unemployment, poverty and lack of access to consumer goods are converted into a lack of interest, plans and will of each and every one (Bodart, 2022, n.p.).

The meritocratic and individualist philosophy was incorporated in its speech and in the conception of the EREMs, reflecting the neoliberal spirit present in the process of privatization of education policies or in business pedagogy.

Currently, Pernambuco has 637 schools with extended hours, with at least one full-time school in each Pernambuco municipality, in addition to the Fernando de Noronha Archipelago. The state has the highest percentage of secondary school students in the country (62.5% in 2022) enrolled in this school model. Contradictorily, however, this educational model has generated a large contingent of marginality.

For instance, in 2019, Pernambuco occupied the third place in the ranking of young people aged 15 to 17 out of school in the country (15.4% of the population in this age group). In 2021, more than 261,000 young people aged 15 to 19 were not attending school due to various factors, among which Botler and Nascimento (2023, p. 37) called active exclusion, collateral exclusion and a hostile and excluding professional environment.

Despite this reality that reveals structural problems in our society, the research we undertook revealed other processes that generate inequalities and marginalities, among which we highlight: the active exclusion of the most vulnerable students from the EREMs, such as young workers, students with disabilities, teenage mothers, offenders and undisciplined teenagers or who are out of age range, in addition to transvestites and transsexuals; collateral exclusion, resulting from a highly competitive school environment among students and among schools; demand/expectation for results in the excessive supply of curricular components and contents, which has generated illness and school dropout; with that, it is observed the production of a hostile and excluding professional environment also for the professors (Botler; Nascimento, 2023, p. 37).

It happens that the education policies that make the adolescents themselves responsible, in an isolated way, for successful results, make it impossible to overcome these marginalities; on the contrary, they feed them back and aggravate them. Equally, these are not overcome simply through the “legal-social affirmation of a set of human rights linked to education and
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generational stages” (Botler; Nascimento, 2023, p. 19), materialized in education policies, but add to this endeavor the challenge of combating racial, ethnic, religious and gender differences related to education and school.

For these reasons, student protagonism, contrary to the aspirations of managerial school organization, must encourage the fight against various injustices through the educational process, as one of the dimensions of democratic education, which includes the promotion of spaces for participation. In this regard,

[...] it implies a dimension of struggle, resistance, combat and/or confrontation of the antagonisms produced by the real world, lived and experienced by the active voice of the subjects who are confronted in the political arena. It constitutes a position taken in the face of threats that affect everyone as a species. In these terms, the protagonist is the one who assumes the construction of a new reality, giving rise to new dreams and paving the way for a new society (Amaral, 2022, p. 56).

In school micropolitics, therefore, protagonism involves in itself the conflictual perspective, since it focuses on the problematization of reality and student demands, at the same time that it is inserted in a context of school hierarchization, an environment in which it is located at the social end to be subordinated, subjected, even to managerial dictates that require high performance in the results of cognition tests, not always consistent with their real demands.

These aspects stimulated us to ask the following question: How the managers of EREMs in Pernambuco have equalized both the yearnings for the whole exercise of active citizenship for the renewal of the common world present in the students (Arendt, 2015), and the education policy that presses for relative indicators to meritocracy and standardization performances to reach high rates in large-scale tests? In an attempt to respond to this provocation, we collected data on the strategies of school managers in view of this dilemma.

Methodological path

The data that we bring in this paper constitute a research cut off that has the relationship between school and democracy as a background, aiming to analyze the potential of the school in promoting student protagonism. It is a qualitative research, of the case study type, which investigated two Secondary Education Reference Schools in Pernambuco.

The schools were selected because they have instituted student unions and because they develop the actions of the Youth Protagonism Project, since they have become full-time schools, in accordance with the guidelines already indicated by the education network. We also used
A geographic criterion, choosing one of them in Recife, the capital of the state, and the other in the hinterlands of the state.

To collect data, we organized a semi-structured interview script, guaranteeing the ethical secrecy of the subjects who spontaneously assented to the invitation to participate in the research, by signing an Informed Consent Form. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which social isolation was required as part of health care, we conducted one of the interviews via the Google Meet platform. The interviews were transcribed by the researchers themselves.

Qualitative data analysis followed the precepts proposed by Bardin (1977). In the initial phase of data processing, or pre-analysis, we based ourselves on the theoretical categories established from the research objectives, namely, school democracy in the perspective of promoting the political action of its subjects; the characterization of demands, on the part of school subjects, for right and justice; and conceptions of quality in education and their implications in terms of students’ future projects. As it is a part of the research, in this paper, we do not advance in all these axes of analysis. Then, from the data already treated, we proceeded precisely to the analysis, a moment in which new categories emerged. From there, we reached inferences, among which the notion of tutored protagonism emerges, as we will see below.

For the purpose of presenting the data and aiming to guarantee the ethical aspect and safeguard confidentiality, we used acronyms to name the subjects: GEAB, for the school manager of Alvo de Bala Reference School, located in the capital; GEDL, for the school manager of Doce de Leite Reference School, located in the interior of the state.

Alvo de Bala Reference School is located in a neighborhood on the outskirts of the capital of Pernambuco and had 330 students and 26 teachers when we collected the data. When we visited this school, the assistant director clarified that “today they only work with the ideal age group”, that is, students within the expected age range for secondary education, and adds that there are no more drug users there since it became full-time, because, in full-time school, drug-using students can’t stand to stay all day long.

Doce de Leite Reference School has a union tradition, as well as the Protagonists’ Club – which represent two institutional spaces for political participation by students, important, in our view, for influencing educational micropolitics. It is an award-winning school that has become a reference in its city due to the quality of the teaching offered and recognized by several national awards in the field of pedagogical management and innovation. At the time of the interview, there were 24 professors and 568 students enrolled.
We draw attention to the fact that we do not treat the following data in a comparative way, considering that cultural, infrastructural, geographic and social realities cannot be analyzed in this way. We highlight, therefore, the implantation and implementation of policies on student protagonism/participation within each school, in order to make explicit how both establish a management practice that ensures such policies.

School and student protagonism: repercussions of policies on school practices

Student protagonism is assimilated to the official curriculum for all EREMs and associated with the discourse on the co-responsibility of the student in individual and school success. For this reason, we clarify that it is not, in principle, a micro-policy aimed at participation and protagonism instituted by the school. Furthermore, the formation of these protagonist subjects takes place through teams external to the school provided by the ICE, which remains in public-private partnership with the Government of the State of Pernambuco.

However, the management of the set of actions and attributions related to the Project, as well as the possibilities of engagement of these secondary education students in school - whether with a more democratic model – inclusive or bureaucratic – functionalist – depends, to a large extent, on the profile of the school management team.

In view of this, we sought to learn about the subjects’ understanding regarding protagonism, to which GEAB replied: “the thing about youth protagonism is to awaken this professional initiative. This initiative of taking charge of his own life, regardless of the area in which you are skilled”. The excerpt reflects that the school has as a reference the construction of the life project, which provides the constitution of a protagonism that allows for the establishment of goals and strategies to reach personal success. In the same way, it demonstrates the intention to stimulate the student’s autonomy in order to constitute him/her as an economically active subject in the consumer society, but not just that. This model is in line with the discourse of Pernambuco’s education policy that mobilizes students’ participation in the educational process for the development of skills and abilities that allow them to work in the labor world.

In turn, the GEDL relates the protagonism to cognitive advances in the face of pressure for educational results and, in these terms, he makes it clear that it aims to obtain educational results equivalent to private schools. In such conditions, the protagonism must lead the school
to be “a reference in teaching. Even because the teacher we have worked in the public school, not in the private school (...), he worked on protagonism with the students”.

In these terms, not all students can belong to the Protagonists’ Club, since what happens, in practice, is that the student protagonist is selected by teachers and/or administrators among those with a predisposition to leadership, as well as being able to be combined with the defenses and commitments of school management. Therefore, “the students who really like to participate are the protagonists” (GEDL), that is,

(It is) when we realize that a student has potential, and we guide him from this perspective of leadership, from the perspective of representing the school in events, mobilizing the class, leading, conducting. And we will develop these aspects in him, so that he can be independent when he leaves school (GEAB).

Eventually, the nomination can be made by the Young Protagonists themselves, pointing out those who stand out as affirmative leaders in classrooms, in a predisposition to collaborate with teachers and managers or by bonds of fraternity between peers. There are also those guests who break the rules of the ethos of school protagonists, as a way of keeping them under supervision.

The excerpt also allows us to understand that GEAB associates the notion of protagonism by launching into the future, with a view to qualifying for the job market. Likewise, it allows us to perceive that it conceives participation more directed to the demands of the school bureaucracy, and less focused on student engagement with their own causes or with the potential for autonomy and decision-making.

This is clear considering that the protagonist students are not elected among their peers, but are invited by teachers and the management team to occupy that place: “the teachers who will make the suggestions: ‘this student is very dedicated to my classes’. This is how we select them”, so that they “perform activities, [that is, they] have responsibilities at school” (GEAB).

From the set of activities, we highlight that the Protagonists have the attributions of welcoming colleagues who have just enrolled in the school and aligning them with the institution’s philosophical parameters, consolidating with the freshmen the commitment to reach the school goals, not only of a cognitive nature, but also behavioral, moral and social.

Particularly when referring to the context of social isolation resulting from the Covid-19 Pandemic, GEDL values the protagonist students in articulating with their colleagues for the operation of remote classes: “we had several students who helped the school a lot, as well as the teachers”. These students performed discipline monitoring functions with the opening
of virtual rooms or transmission on YouTube, active search for students who dropped out, emotional support for colleagues and even integration activities with the community where the school is located.

These cooperation actions with the various subjects of the school fit in the role of school protagonism, as highlighted by Demo and Silva (2020). The student

[…] can form partnerships with teachers and colleagues, as well as with the directors. They may have extended responsibilities, in addition to the intrinsic ones (study, learn, behave), in terms of peers (cooperate with colleagues who need school support), teachers (take on indicated/intended roles in collaborative learning, for example, helping to organize the group, the classroom, teaching instruments, etc.), the principals (helping to supervise activities, schedules, agendas), the parents (cooperating in the link between them and the school, in the parents’ meeting, etc.), the community (assuming positions in the interaction with the community, conducting extension activities, etc.) (Demo; Silva, 2020, p. 75, emphasis added).

However, it is possible to note that the protagonists, despite their important role in the school and in the formation of citizenship, can be inserted in a system of privileges that, unfortunately, can be used as a tool to repress and oppress the most vulnerable groups within school. This way, they can operationalize an information management system about the teachers’ pedagogical practice, as well as the behavior of their colleagues, even resulting in the control and demand for obedience to the social behavior stipulated by the management, including during breaks and in the queues for meals.

This situation can create an unfavorable scenario for the most fragile groups, perpetuating inequalities and harming the school environment as a whole, empowering some and subjecting others. Hierarchy and power relations are expressed in a natural way, reflecting the pressure for good results in assessments and management centralization focused on management demands and not on students’ demands. They are, therefore, characteristics of subservience to school management that indicate the criteria for choosing leaders, normalized by the students themselves. In this regard, GEDL states: “the union is currently deactivated, we still don’t have a representative. We were going to choose right now”, blaming the occurrence of the pandemic.

The evidence is that in the Doce de Leite school, the choice of the union-management that goes through the determination of the school management, characterizes a school still guided by adult-centric principles, with a centralizing character. However, it is not expected
that students can be defined as merely naive/passive subjects, since they reserve a privileged position in this status quo, becoming spokespersons of the school management.

*GEAB* criticizes the students’ lack of self-determination at *Alvo de Bala* school and the limits of authentic protagonist action imprinted in the union organization of the school: “in particular, I don’t think the union group is very independent. I think it’s very dependent on us. It waits for us a lot”.

It is worth remembering that, on the other hand, there are students who do not have the necessary characteristics to be invited to participate in prominent spaces. In other words, at the same time, political actions include certain students in school micropolitics, excluding those dispossessed of leadership, good educational results, competitiveness, supportive family background, and vulnerability. Thus, the exercise of control is an important strategy to respond to policy determination and qualify the public high school, at least in terms of external evaluation indicators, which, however, indicates the perpetuation of educational and social inequalities.

It is in this way that the *EREMs* aggregate students with profiles converging with the school’s intended reputation, which reflects the standard desired by education policy, stripped of the inherent criticality of political action. In practice, managers clarify which demands are brought by students to the school organization: “the demand is, for example, to play ball during the break” (*GEAB*), and *GEDL* reports that the main causes of conversations with management are about the teaching-learning process.

Such issues cannot go unnoticed, nor be understood as a total absence of political action. Firstly, the introjection of education policy as a demand for student co-responsibility makes these subjects feel compelled to appear in the management room to complain about the lack of content, pedagogical difficulties with teachers, or low levels of learning. Secondly, social networks were bombarded with criticism on the lack of materials, food, and other inputs when the new government took over as an authentic manifestation of secondary education students in Pernambuco. That is, these subjects began to spontaneously mobilize and guide the State itself without being instructed by managers.

Despite this, the excessive demand for results and the volume of content required in full-time schools generate excessive fatigue and separate students from the political organization, leading to the meritocratic personalization of the selection of protagonist students. The processes that lead to protagonism practices tend to manifest a model of *tutored youth protagonism*, in which it is necessary to preserve individual privileges and the *status* of power.
In view of the achievement of results and goals stipulated by the government of Pernambuco, the Reference Schools are excluding, by principle, since, in general, the adolescent worker, the “misfit” or the one who has some disability, given that they “do not adapt”. Thus, the Young Protagonists engendered are related by Carvalho (2021) to a management concept in which conflict is not accepted, which he calls “estadania”\(^5\). Even, eventually, divergent leaderships are co-opted into the group of protagonists, or those who do not adapt to the integral system are excluded.

In both cases, as well as in the previous excerpts, it is perceived that the initiatives of leadership in the school have always been linked to issues of order specific to school management, teaching, and/or maintenance of the school as a highlight of a given model of quality related to the Full-Time Education policy in Pernambuco. This also implies a distancing from protagonism/participation as a principle of complete protection, that is, as a manifestation of active citizenship that provides them with opportunities for their physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development, in conditions of freedom and dignity.

In the consummation of school micro-policies, practices related to autonomy are not frequent, on the contrary, in most of them, students are regulated through their behavior and the rules and disciplinary conduct that govern institutions. Even when there is an attempt to encourage the development of autonomy, these initiatives are often previously defined by adults, managers, or teachers. That is, students’ autonomy is limited, and they have few opportunities to exercise truly independent decisions in their educational journey.

It is noticed that the groups of protagonists ended up incorporating themselves as a school management team, as they assumed the execution of some tasks, such as the distribution of materials and monitoring compliance with disciplinary rules.

**Final considerations**

One of the guidelines of Pernambuco’s educational system is the implementation of full-time schools, through which the student is placed as the protagonist. However, when we analyze the expressions of the managers of these schools, we realize that students are not demanding significant changes, nor acting proactively against the lack of support from the State. Instead,
they assume a leadership role linked to carrying out tasks, participating in school activities, and collaborating with the actions proposed by the managers of these schools.

The lack of protagonism of students may be a reflection of a more traditional educational culture, in which content is seen as central to learning, leaving little room for active political participation by students in school. In addition, charging management for ascending results in large-scale tests can limit students’ possibilities for action.

This model of action moves away from the principle of participation as a human right, present in the 1988 Federal Constitution and in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent – Law no. 8.069/1990, but it approaches a model of management of educational processes and democracy based on neoliberal ideology, impacting on the form of pedagogical organization and achievement of active citizenship.

Through this Full-Time School Program, instead of promoting dialogical practices based on the democratic principle of healthy conflict, a tutored protagonism is promoted, in which students are prepared for a certain place of subjection in society and in the job market. School distances students more and more from learning an authentic democracy, in the midst of a narrative forged to respond to legal-formal determinations for promotion of child-adolescent protagonism.
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