

Title: Democracy and education: A theoretical proposal for the analysis of democratic practices in schools¹

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Abstract:

In the educational sphere, the concept of *democracy* is used in many and varied ways, though the hegemonic school culture often starts from a concept of democracy that is taken for granted, and it is understood that the entire educational community shares a similar concept.

As a result of the research project "Democracy, participation and inclusive education in schools" we have realized that the above-mentioned concept is used without defining exactly what we are referring to, in the school setting and in many other contexts. This observation is what has prompted us to write this article, basically structured in two parts. In the first part, based on the theoretical debate occurring in the field of social sciences, we delimit the concept of democracy and structure it in four basic dimensions: governance, inhabitation, otherness and *ethos*. In the second part, we specify and examine in depth these four dimensions in the school setting in order to construct a broad and transversal, yet specific, definition, with which to be able to develop ambitious democratic projects and, in turn, contribute to scientific debate.

Keywords:

Democracy, Democratic Schools, Democratic Values, Inclusive Education, Citizenship and Education

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Introduction

Many authors reflect on the role of schools in promoting democracy, but they almost never address the implicit controversy of the concept, and proposals elaborated from the educational sphere are generally unrelated to current philosophical, politological and sociological debate on democracy. Hence, the hegemonic meaning of the term, which is shared in our schools (with exceptions that we cannot overlook), tends to be simple, ambiguous, diffuse, and often situated halfway between the banal and the defense of values where virtually everything fits. *Democracy*, in education, is associated indiscriminately with governability, altruism, equality, the common good, collaboration and participation, without any precise criteria to establish the relationship of each of these concepts with democracy.

This situation is not new nor is it exclusive to the field of education. In 1852 Auguste Blanqui had already called for a clarification of "what is a democrat" and declared that we found ourselves "before a vague and trivial term, with no precise meaning, an elastic term" (Blanqui 2006, p. 172). One hundred fifty years later, Wendy Brown (2011), among others, argues that this vagueness has even increased. Jean-Luc Nancy (2011, p. 58) also considers that "the signifier 'democracy' has become an exemplary case of absence of meaning" and, still more radically, Jacques Rancière (2011, p. 78) claims that for as long as the word *democracy* has existed "the only consensus that exists consists of the idea that 'democracy' means different and opposing things".²

Given this situation, it is undeniable that democracy as a concept remains highly attractive today; broad sectors of society identify with it, and groups and movements appear in the political sphere that rally to the cause of democratic regeneration, democratic radicalism or a more authentic and "true" democracy.³ It is therefore important to clarify what we mean when we refer to democracy in education and it is imperative for the concept we are going to employ to be consistent with the conceptualization of the term in other fields. Clearly, it is not a question of settling the debates surrounding the concept⁴ but to clarify the meanings, and to clarify them it seems essential to us to define how we will treat the concept.

Thus, in the following section we expose how the research team understood democracy (and democracy in the field of education), interweaving classical aspects (such as governance) with less common ones (such as inhabitance and otherness), and others that are very present in the area of education (values).

Democracy: four dimensions to take into account

The first thing we must recognize is that democracy is a form of government in which the sovereignty of political power resides in the citizens and in which, consequently, structures of participation and free and informed decision making are established and organized. We call this dimension of democracy

² According to other authors, the issue is not the lack of definition of the concept, but the degradation of democratic practices. Thus, Daniel Bensaïd (2011, p. 16) states that popular sovereignty today lies hidden behind democratic formalism, and Sheldon S. Wolin (2008) speaks of a fugitive democracy, a mere episodic expression of the legitimate rights of the people.

³ "Democracy now" and "they call it democracy, but it is not" are some of the most popular slogans chanted in the 15M demonstrations in Spain, just as they were in other countries like the United States, with the OWS (Occupy Wall Street) movement that began in New York, or the United Kingdom, with the OL (Occupy London) movement in London.

⁴ Although not the subject of analysis of our article, we wish to highlight the contributions that Ingerad Straume made in the article "Democracy, Education and the Need for Politics". The analysis of the theoretical perspectives of Dewey, Rawls and Gutman and Biesta opens new perspectives in the political conceptualization of the term democracy with the purpose of vindicating the socio-political nature of education.

governance.⁵ However, a description of the forms of government is not sufficient to characterize democracy. It is necessary to delve into the conditions that enable the exercise of popular sovereignty and free and informed participation and decision making.

To identify these conditions, it is helpful to look at the three generations of human rights systematized by Karel Vasak in 1977. According to this Czech-French jurist, "while first-generation rights (civil and political) were based on the right to oppose the State and those of the second generation (economic, social and cultural) on the right to place demands on the State, those of the third generation currently being proposed to the international community are rights of solidarity" (Vasak 1977, 1984).

As we know, first-generation human rights were formulated at the end of the 18th century, in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 and in the Bill of Rights of the United States of America in 1791. They focus mainly on governance, that is, on liberty and participation in political life and on the forms and limits of the exercise of power. However, it soon became evident that democratic governance alone was not sufficient for living together, that this required certain living conditions, and economic, social and cultural rights. We will call this dimension of democracy *inhabitation*, since it deals with the conditions in which people inhabit. This second generation of human rights, together with the first, was embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

As of the 1980s, and despite the fact that first and second generation human rights had by no means been fully achieved, it in turn became evident that governance and inhabitation were insufficient for living together; that mutual recognition and fraternity with others, as well as respect for the planet were also necessary, whereupon rights began to be formulated including the rights to self-determination, difference and peace, and the right to a preserved, healthy and sustainable environment not only for contemporaries, but also for future generations, etc. For our purposes, we will call this dimension of democracy *otherness*, as it deals with recognition of the other and of the different.

In each of these three dimensions of democracy the *ethos* (character, way of being and of living in the world) of individuals and collectives surfaces. Without specific values, virtues and characters it is impossible to articulate governance, inhabitation and otherness. Without humanist values, virtues and characters governance turns into participation or bureaucracy, inhabitation becomes complacency, and otherness is impossible. These dimensions are brought into play in approaching democracy as a form of associated life. As Bernstein (2010, p. 251) states when analyzing Dewey's work: "Democracy is the personal way in which an individual lives life and only becomes a reality when practiced in our day-to-day existence".

Consequently, in this article, when speaking about democracy, we will take into consideration the four dimensions of any democratic project: governance, inhabitation, otherness and *ethos*.

2.1 Democracy as governance

Democracy as governance refers to the structures and processes through which political decisions are made and the public sphere is managed, as well as to a method and rules of coexistence. In modernity, this sense of democracy is embodied in the liberal tradition, in the first generation of human rights and the rule of law.

⁵ We use the concept *governance* in its most generic sense, of "forms of government", and more specifically to refer to processes, devices or mechanisms designed for decision making. We are not referring to the concept of *governance* as it has been defined since the 1990s as a "new form of government characterized by the interaction of institutions at different levels and by public administrations interacting and working in network with civil society or private organizations" (Rhodes 1997; Subirats 2010).

This dimension is what generates greater consensus among theorists of democracy.⁶ Thus, for Bobbio (1986: 9) the minimum definition of democracy consists of “a set of procedural rules for collective decision making in which the broadest possible participation of stakeholders is envisaged and fostered”. From this perspective, democracy is a form of social organization that attributes ownership of political power to recognized individuals who form a society. Generically, it is a form of social coexistence in which its members are free and equal and social relations are established according to contractual mechanisms. More particularly, it is a form of State organization in which collective decisions are adopted by the people (by those who are recognized as citizens) through different mechanisms of participation.

However, beyond the consensus generated around democracy as a particular form of government, discrepancies appear when establishing the specific characteristics that democratic governance should have.⁷ How should popular sovereignty be translated to making concrete decisions? Or, to what degree should the principles of democratic governance be extended?

2.2 Democracy as *inhabitanace*

The humanist and socialist tradition, and more recently new social movements, have considered that political freedoms alone were not sufficient, that democracy is not only *governance* but *inhabitanace* as well, that political participation in conditions of freedom and equality is not only a procedural question, but also material. Hence, debate surrounding democracy showed concern for the conditions in which people live and propounded that governance requires basic conditions of quality of life and well-being for all people in order for it to be truly democratic. Without the attenuation or elimination of certain inequalities, any pretense of participation in political life on an equal basis is mere fantasy; for political life to be egalitarian, it must be based on economic, material and health conditions, and access to information, training and security that make this possible. This is what we mean when we talk about *inhabitanace*.

The opening of the concept of *democracy* towards issues that go beyond governance became evident in the second generation of human rights, which vindicated as fundamental the right to education, health, work, housing, culture and creativity, and began to materialize, albeit in a timid and limited way, in the so-called welfare state.

Recently proposals have been made that attempt to specify human rights and identify what is required for a life worthy of human dignity. The "Capabilities Approach to Human Development" of Amartya Sen (1999, 2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2011), for example, moves in this direction. This approach is based on the consideration that personal and political governance (to choose and act) require capabilities that Nussbaum (2011, p. 21) defined as follows: "I call these states of the person (not fixed, but fluid and dynamic) internal capabilities. They are to be distinguished from innate equipment: they are trained or developed traits and abilities, developed, in most cases, in interaction with the social, economic, familial, and political environment". One of the most interesting contributions of Amartya Sen in the development

⁶ Never a complete consensus: from Marxism it has always been considered that liberal democracy, which left economics outside the scope of popular sovereignty, focused on formal aspects (*possibility* to choose and to be elected) and renounced substantive aspects (under this form of democracy it is possible that the whole of the *demos* may not be able to decide on fundamental aspects that affect their existence and that frequently remain unresolved); hence, it was considered to be a somewhat less than democratic form of government that must be overcome in favor of the process of emancipation they pursued for the whole of humanity (Marx, 1975 [1843]; MacPherson, 1973).

⁷ Apart from the usual distinction between direct, indirect or representative democracy and participatory democracy, the proposal of "deliberative democracy" (Bessette, 1980; Habermas, 1998; Blattberg, 2003; Talisse, 2004), which places emphasis on the examination of public debate and the reasons of justice and general interest, seems especially appropriate for the field of education (for the educational dimension it entails). This model can be contrasted with the model of democracy based on negotiation, which starts from the capacity to reach agreements or establish counterparts based on the power and negotiating capacity of each actor and in which the common good may prove to be secondary. To understand the distinction between the deliberative and the aggregative models (not necessarily liberal), Young (2000), Ovejero (2003) and Hanson and Howe (2011) are particularly enlightening.

of economic and social indicators is the concept of the capabilities approach: people must have the capability to convert their rights into real events, such that a government should be judged on the specific capabilities it provides to its citizens, for example to be able to vote.⁸ These capabilities range from access to education, to citizens having a means of transportation that allows them to arrive at polling places. Only when these barriers are overcome can it be said that citizens can exercise their personal choice. Martha Nussbaum's⁹ work develops, explores in depth, and in some cases modifies this line of exploration begun by Sen.

Different theorists of democracy also refer to the conditions of inhabitation as an essential prerequisite for us to be able to speak of democracy. One of them is Paolo Flores d'Arcais who states:

"A citizen, first and foremost, is a body, a *bios*. To exercise power, they have to be able to live. Even the most intolerant of metaphysicians would grant this 'materialism'. If there are no guarantees for the *bios*, there is no possibility of will or decision. The *bios* is the first '*chez soi*', original and inalienable, of the individual citizen in relation to society: the beginning of political equality and, to start speaking meaningfully, physiological equality of the vital minimum." (Flores d'Arcais 2005, p. 29)

Flores d'Arcais considers that this vital minimum includes food, housing and health care and believes that these factors are the "inalienable material foundation of abstract equality (for instance, of political equality) between citizens" (2005, p. 30). To not guarantee this basic inhabitation causes some to live below the minimum while others live in the privilege of disproportionate wealth, and democracy suffers from this, because "the sick, and perhaps even more than the hungry, are absolutely dependent: they cannot dissent, nor even decide" (2005, p. 30).

As Flores d'Arcais points out, it is not about taking advantage of discussing democracy to interpolate social objectives; it is a question of recognizing that equality goes beyond the formal equality of "one person, one vote". Furthermore, he asserts that equality must reach aspects in which education plays a fundamental role, because in order to deliberate and decide we need to know.

For Flores d'Arcais, access to training and information are fundamental aspects of democracy. Savater (1999) also arrives at similar approaches. He considers that, beyond democratic isonomy (equality before the law and equal ability to participate in the enactment and abolition of laws), the democratic project contains, more or less explicitly, the ideal of achieving other forms of equality (1999: 86). He justifies this in two ways: (i) because it is necessary that all members of society have equal opportunities to realize their abilities, and (ii) because for democratic isonomy to be effective and efficient it is necessary that all people have a sufficient degree of personal independence regarding their most imperious needs.

Therefore, he asserts that democratic decisions have to be oriented towards a more complete and thorough equalization of social conditions. Savater warns of the tension that in any democratic system is generated between the principle of equality and the principle of freedom, which refers to two democratic traditions. On the one hand, the republican, which emphasizes participation in the political life of the community, advocates a virtuous and responsible citizenry able to take control of their destinies, and seeks to encourage participation, deliberation and the public good and to abolish any form of domination. On the other hand, there is the liberal tradition, which gives priority to individual freedom and the inviolability of

⁸ His approach based on "capabilities" ties in with the idea of positive freedom (the actual ability of a person to be or do something), instead of negative freedom (the absence of prohibitions).

⁹ Nussbaum identifies ten core capabilities, which have to do with (1) longevity, (2) physical health, (3) physical integrity, (4) the senses, imagination and thought, (5) emotions, (6) practical reason, (7) membership, (8) the relationship with other species, (9) play, and lastly, (10) control over one's environment. (Nussbaum, 2012: 52-55). Of these ten core capabilities identified by Nussbaum, governance covers only certain aspects, while the remainder refer to *inhabitation* and otherness. (Nussbaum, 2011: 33-35).

private life. Undoubtedly, our proposal is closer to the republican conception than the liberal¹⁰, or what Barber (1984) has defined as "strong democracy": a system where citizens actively participate and the government is not in the hands of the few, where there is the will to correct some of the undesirable consequences of inequality, discrimination and domination, and where mechanisms of social inclusion and deliberative processes appear as fundamental.

Inhabitation, therefore, is understood as conditions of being that encompass two fundamental aspects: the minimum conditions that enable participation and that we can relate to certain ideas of social justice, and the quality of reception, coexistence and welfare of the contexts where participation develops (in the educational setting they have been called "climate of the school" or "climate of coexistence"). If, as we have stated, our option is based on a republican, participatory and deliberative conception of democracy, we must consider that everything that favors or is predisposed to participation contributes to the quality of democratic processes.

However, today we know that in order to encourage participation it is not sufficient to merely guarantee minimum equal conditions for all, and that to ensure the quality of experiential contexts it is necessary to recognize differences and provide them with suitable answers. The policies of the first modernity, inattentive to diversity, no longer serve our needs, as they tended to be configured in a universalistic manner.

2.3 Democracy as otherness

Recently, the humanist tradition has insisted and advanced in the study of responsibility towards the other. This third opening of the word *democracy* is reflected in the third generation of human rights: protection of minority groups or those discriminated against, respect for cultural diversity and, in general, for the choices people make in the most diverse areas of their lives (sexuality, religion, diet, etc.) in an increasingly heterogeneous society. This dimension of democracy nullifies the old paradigm of mathematical power through which the majority imposes their will on minorities, replacing it with the paradigm of reasonableness and respect.

As authors of reference of these approaches we can cite Charles Taylor (1994) or Bill Kymlicka (1995a, 1995b), especially concerned about respect for minorities, practices and policies of recognition and protection of community rights. Henry Giroux (2005) is one of the authors who have applied some of their principles and arguments to the field of education.

Within this perspective we can include all those actions, policies, programs and attitudes that enable the normalized, dignified and positive recognition of persons and non-hegemonic groups that because of this condition are easily rendered invisible or negatively represented (stigmatized). Otherness refers to the recognition of the "other." There are those who, like Axel Honneth, refer to three-dimensional recognition: emotional (through relationships of love and friendship, which make self-confidence possible), legal (through equality and legal protection or rule of law, which allow an elemental self-respect) and social (through social consideration and assessment, which make self-esteem possible) Non-recognition, disparagement, humiliation, failure to respect dignity or exercising violence against the identity of a person or group, can cause, states Honneth, their "psychic death" or "social death", but also the reaction and struggle in their different forms of expression (Honneth 1997). Political and social recognition have also been addressed by Kymlicka (1995a, 1995b) and Taylor (1994), among other authors.

Otherness is an essential dimension for promoting democratic forms of participation and government. To guarantee the principle of equality between people is essential but not sufficient. It must also be ensured that this principle is not imposed arbitrarily on all individuals. Linguistic, sexual, cultural or any other kind of diversity must be recognized and respected, provided they do not violate fundamental rights, and

¹⁰ The texts of Pettit (1997a, 1997b), Ovejero *et al.* (2004), Sandel (1998, 2004) and Agulló (2014) adequately describe the two traditions, while helping to position our proposal in relation to them.

at the same time, it must be ensured that certain discourses based on diversity do not serve as a basis for establishing principles of inequality (Taguieff 1990). All of this leads us to the need to clarify the criteria that must be established and the values to promote in a society that seeks to be democratic.

2.4. Democracy as *ethos*: virtues and values

In the introduction we noted that to define our model of democracy we understand that along with governance, inhabitation and otherness we contemplate an *ethos*, since that without values, virtues and certain characters it is impossible for governance, inhabitation and otherness to function in accordance with democratic standards. Thus, *ethos* (largely, that which education has been addressing for centuries) is an integral and fundamental part of the other three dimensions.

This proposal is consistent with the republican tradition, with which we have already expressed our affinity. From this tradition, it is considered necessary to cultivate the virtue of citizens if we want the community to take control of its own destinies (Sandel 1996), and it is assumed that citizenship not only entails rights for the individual, but also duties.

Public virtues are intimately related to the sustaining of republican liberty, virtues understood as "capabilities that each of us must possess as a citizen: capabilities that allow us to willingly serve the common good" (Skinner 2004, p. 106). Philip Pettit also considers that republican laws require the support of "forms of virtue, good citizenship, or civility" (1997b, p. 326), in so far as they ensure greater respect for the law, improve their application and favor their submission to collective interests.¹¹ Agulló (2014, p. 226) states that all advocates of republicanism agree that civic virtue is the "backbone" (Giner, 1998, p. 2) of republican democracy, and that there cannot be genuine deliberation (nor valuable or desirable participation) without citizens who are aware of their duties and responsibilities, competent, active, well informed and willing to make a commitment to act in the service of the public good (Peña 2000, p. 196). Agulló, in turn, cites Rubio Carracedo (2005), who states that only an elevated sense of democracy enables politics based on popular sovereignty to function properly.

The list of specific qualities (moral principles, virtues) that should be promoted diverges from one author to another, but there is a degree of consensus on the need to promote qualities such as responsibility, commitment, prudence, continence, tolerance, courage, respect for others and their freedom and opinions, and capacities that include knowing how to listen and express oneself, searching for and selecting information and knowing how to interpret and contrast it, developing critical and independent thinking and resolving conflicts peacefully. Many of these aspects are already part of democratic education programs.

3. Democracy in the classroom: the four dimensions of democracy in the field of education

Thus far we have established a way of understanding democracy that, on the one hand, aims to be consistent with some of the current approaches being dealt with in disciplines such as political science, sociology, legal theory or philosophy and, on the other, has enabled us to analyze in depth the challenges, dilemmas and uncertainties faced by ten schools in the complex relationship between the formal discourse of democracy and daily practices consistent with a political commitment to education. The concept we have woven of a democratic school throughout this study entails an open, integrated and complex

¹¹ Concerning the defense and promotion of civic virtues, there are notable differences in the discourse of current republicans (Ovejero *et al.* 2004, p. 26). Some continue considering them as the only way to elevate the character of citizens and tend to a certain perfectionism, while others defend them for purely instrumental reasons, as a means to promote deliberation in the service of social justice (for example Sunstein 2004, p. 153). On the other hand, Ovejero, Martí and Gargarella (2004, p. 27) caution that, while liberal discourse has traditionally been more reticent to speak of virtues (in that they would be linked to specific conceptions of "the good", which the State should refrain from supporting), several authors of liberal inspiration have begun to reflect on the role of civic virtues based on liberal principles and cite Macedo (1990), Galston (1991) and Rawls (1993).

perspective that goes beyond strict participation and that relates to the four dimensions constructed in the previous section. These dimensions bring us closer to proposals for democratic education and the democratization of schools advanced by different authors today.

3.1. Governance in educational contexts

To analyze school governance mainly involves analysis of all of the bodies and processes related to decision making that affect the relationship between members of the educational community or that have a dimension of interpersonal or common or collective interest. Thus, the analysis of governance would lead us to analyze the functioning of bodies established by the administration (institutional bodies) as well as those established by the school (their own bodies), of institutionalized bodies (recurrent and regulated) and noninstitutionalized (more or less spontaneous and often unregulated), etc. These governance bodies and processes can be differentiated by the type of participation of each of the agents, their representativeness or the competences that are attributed to them. Thus, it is of great interest to analyze in each school how crucial questions are resolved such as: What forms of participation and/or representation are encouraged? Which aspects can be decided upon and which decisions are considered to be the province of only one particular body? How do participation and decision making affect the hierarchy between teachers and students?

Analysis and proposals of this type are posed, for example, in the Proyecto Atlántida [Atlantis Project], which formulates proposals for a school in which all educational and social partners (local social agents, participatory structures of families and governing bodies of the centers) share responsibility for its operation (Luengo 2006). In an interesting article, Alvarez (2004) offers a critical review of the functioning of the governance mechanisms of public and *concertada* [private establishment financed with public funds] schools, analyzes the official political bodies of the center and what he calls "micro politics", and offers some suggestions for improvement aimed at training for participation and change in the dynamics of governance. Jordi Garreta, in a study on associations of parents (2008), provides abundant data and recommendations on the role that these associations have in the governance of schools and in educational activity in general, and calls for internal democracy and open structures to facilitate their participation. Edelstein (2011) is another author interested in governance, which he conceives of as a prototype of democratic government (an idea that is related in some ways, with Freinet), and proposes learning *through democracy* as a form of "learning democracy". *Learning through democracy* involves, among other things, student participation in the processes of government articulated through *self-government practices* as a tool that offers the possibility of collecting the expression and discussion of the wishes of students in the classroom and in the center.

As Flutter (2007) affirms, assessing the voice of the student body is a complex task. To ensure that the voice of students will be heard involves the broad participation of all students in all areas of decision making of the school (both in organization and curriculum, and in determining the educational mission and philosophy). In the words of Sutherland (2006, p. 8): "Student voice and student participation in schools need to be part of a collaborative ethos that embraces all members of the school community".

3.2. Inhabitation in educational contexts

In speaking of *inhabitation* in the school context we are referring to the set of actions that make the educational community, and especially students, feel good and be able to fulfill their main task: to be autonomous citizens, with good judgment, able to relate well with others, to be happy people and be able to successfully complete the various stages of the education system. This is a broad and diverse principle that we have centered around three issues: actions designed to provide a good reception for the community (especially students, teachers and families); strategies that favor educational success for all; and lastly, those relating to educational infrastructures and human, economic and pedagogical resources.

First, those related to reception refer to actions that are carried out to facilitate participation in the center of students and families with difficult living conditions (with deficits of *inhabitation*), and to mitigate as much as possible the interference that these situations cause for them. This includes ease of access to the

center (one can hardly speak of political equality if access to certain centers is conditioned by the payment of fees or if families have difficulty accessing school material), aid for access to certain services (one wonders whether it makes sense to talk about school success or participation of families when some students do not have their daily meals guaranteed), scheduling meetings on days and at times so that working families may attend, taking specific actions so that parents from disadvantaged groups can serve on the school board, and the existence of channels or protocols to detect and address problems that may occur in the family and have repercussions on children.

Second, the strategies set in motion by the school to achieve the educational success of all students encompass actions aimed at capacitating all members of the educational community, especially students, but also their families, to participate in democratic processes. They also include educational actions and support in the classroom so that all students may acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to develop their capabilities and live in society. This means that all students, regardless of their social, economic or geographical origin, may have school success in the terms posed by Ainscow *et al.* (2004).

And last, it includes taking care of all those aspects that favor participation to the extent that they make it easy and enjoyable and contribute to the quality of life and well-being of those involved in the center. Examples include conditions of habitability of schools, ease of access to the center and its professionals, establishment of a climate of harmony and cordiality, existence of a positive bond of all educational agents with the school, amenity and comfort of the architecture and attention to the decoration of the center, etc.

Under these conditions, students and teachers share reciprocity in interpersonal relations. Only when understood in this way can the trust be built that allows relationships in which all the participants, in this case pupils and teachers, feel that they are full partners (Thornberg & Elvstrand 2012). As Simó, Parareda and Domingo (2016, p. 2) pointed out, “In the realm of education, the quality of the shared life is described as the school atmosphere, which involves two fundamental aspects: the minimum conditions that make possible the participation of each and every one of the members of the school community, and the level of receptiveness, the quality of the shared life and the sense of well-being of the contexts in which participation occurs.”

Many authors have stressed these aspects linked to the discourse of democracy and democratic quality in education. Gutmann and Thomson (1996), for example, focus on the first aspect that we mentioned when they argue that to participate in a deliberative democracy there is a general need for certain minimal resources, such as housing and access to healthcare. In the same vein, Apple and Beane (1995) mention the need for structural and institutional inclusion accompanying equal access to education in democratic schools. Serramona and Rodriguez (2010) suggest the need for cultural inclusion of families to empower them to participate, and in a similar way Alvarez (2004) alerts us to the necessity to train students for participation. Meira Levinson (2012) believes that civic involvement of students and, therefore, the possibility of learning about democratic citizenship, presupposes levels of social and ethnic integration in the schools and areas where they are located, and the study by Brady *et al.* (1995) shows that socioeconomic status is included among the predictors of political participation of citizens (in their analysis they go beyond the school environment), evidenced in the possession of resources such as time and civic skills.

Other authors link democracy, equality and academic success. For example, Guarro (2005) asserts that a democratic school is a just school, committed to the democratic reconstruction of its culture to create citizens, properly integrate all students, without discrimination of any type, and provide an education that allows them to live in harmony and actively participate in society. Feito (2009, 2010) argues that a democratic school has to be committed to comprehensiveness and inclusion (it must work towards the academic success of students in the compulsory education stage and should adopt educational strategies that contribute to achieving this goal). Also, Meira Levinson (2012) and Diane Reay (2011) advocate inclusive education and take a position against *tracking*, to the extent that this does not contribute to position students in a situation of maximum equality, and actually does just the opposite. In fact, Reay builds on the work of R. H. Tawney (1964) and extends this argument to advocate for a common school

in order to promote the same capabilities in all students, which she considers essential for navigating the world in which we live, understanding it and positioning ourselves before it judiciously.

3.3. Democracy as otherness

As we have seen in some examples from the previous section, it is sometimes difficult to draw a clear distinction between what corresponds to *inhabitança* and what corresponds to otherness, among other things because frequently the groups considered as "different" turn out to be, moreover, those suffering from the worst conditions of *inhabitança*, and both axes are mutually interfering or reinforcing. In any case, we understand that otherness in the area of education is embodied in the practices, discourses, initiatives, policies or projects that are established in order to recognize (respect, welcome, include) and positively assess the "other" (the other who is minority, unconventional, counterhegemonic, etc.). In this meaning, democratic practice not only consists of "tolerating" the other, but in giving them visibility and "normalized" treatment.

The majority of initiatives aligned in what has been called *intercultural education* (or *critical multiculturalism*, in the British tradition), and the practices of reception and attention to diversity from an inclusive perspective, can be described as initiatives that seek to work on one of the aspects we consider fundamental in any democratic project: otherness. A separate issue is the effectiveness of such practices and the undesirable effects that can be generated and that have been intensively studied and denounced by a large proportion of the researchers who we can situate in this tradition.¹² In this direction, works including those of Paludàrias (2002), Bertran (2005) and Garreta (2009), among many others, go into depth on this dimension of democratic practices, focusing on analysis of the participation of immigrant families in schools, while studies by Paludàrias and Feu (1997) analyze reception and recognition at school (it is somewhat more difficult to find works on inclusion and recognition of other forms of diversity).

3.4. Education of *ethos*: values, virtues and capabilities

The fourth and final dimension is that of values, attitudes and competences that enable us to participate fully and responsibly in democratic processes. We have already mentioned that values are an area that seems particularly educational, scholastic even; there are many authors who insist that democratic education consists of an education in values and think of it as an element of ethics. What varies substantially from one author to another is how these moral values, these attitudes and the ability to implement them are transferred to students. Manuel Barbosa (2000), for example, establishes three basic models: the model of transmission of knowledge and values, according to which content is transmitted through the explicit curriculum integrated in one or more subjects; the model of training democratic habits, which seeks to develop democratic routines and attitudes through experience and implementation of democratic practices in schools, and the model of direct confrontation with socio-political reality, which aims to develop democratic values and attitudes through the exposure and involvement of students in real social problems. Guarro (2002, 2005) as well as Barbosa (2000) and Edelstein (2011) contribute abundant bibliography on authors who have elaborated proposals along these lines, and on projects and programs that have been developed and on researchers who have analyzed the limitations and problems of some of these proposals. One aspect that seems particularly relevant to highlight is the notion of citizenship that we relate to this way of understanding democracy. In this connection, Lawy and Biesta (2006) and Biesta, Lawy and Kelly (2009) contrast the concepts *Citizenship-as-achievement* and *Citizenship-as-practice*. In the first, the skills and capabilities learned in school are those that students need when they leave school and become future citizens, while the second concept understands students

¹² Primarily based on the work of Taguieff (1990). In Spain, San Roman (1996) includes many of the contributions of the French philosopher, and Carbonell (2000), has effectively transferred them to the field of education. Serra (2002) exposes the criticism to the first multiculturalism and presents the basic axes of critical multiculturalism and interculturalism. Authors like Delgado (2003) move away from the optimism or possibilism of others, and continue to raise profound criticism of both multicultural and intercultural approaches.

as citizens involved in the existing socio-political, economic and cultural order. Thus the conditions in which students experience the school institution, and the interpersonal relations that develop there, shape their way of understanding and living life. Accordingly, we share with Biesta and Lawy (2006, p. 43): "Citizenship is no longer a solely adult experience but is experienced and articulated as a wider shift in social relations common to all age groups. It is reflexive because it feeds back on itself, and is relational because it is affected by different factors, including social and structural conditions that play upon it. As such it cannot be simply learned in school or in any other institution but is common to all situations".

4. Conclusion

The proposals for analysis of democracy in the sphere of education and proposals for implementation of what is intended to be a democratic education encompass very diverse fields: from forms of governance to the commitment to comprehensiveness and inclusion; from a curriculum centered on democratic values to the defense of recognition or the commitment to interculturalism; from academic success for all to the development of the critical capacity of students. But this was the starting point of our article; the aim was to show the extent to which such heterogeneous proposals could be framed as proposals for promoting democracy in education.

At the beginning of the article, we observed that very few of the works on democracy and education made an effort to link their proposals intended for the educational sphere with an idea of democracy sufficiently comprehensive so as to be acceptable for those disciplines that have traditionally worked on, and continue to work on, this concept. We believe that throughout these pages we have shown how, from the republican and deliberative concept of democracy (two currents of democratic thought still fully relevant and recognizable in current political and academic debate), we can establish and delimit this notion of democracy that is at once coherent, acceptable and comprehensive. This is a notion that unfolds in four dimensions: governance, inhabitation, otherness and *ethos*, which any democratic project should consider and which has the virtue of collecting the process of progressive recognition and expansion of human rights, as has been analyzed and systematized by Karel Vasak (1977, 1984). And lastly, it is a conception of democracy that allows us to position ourselves clearly before the current crisis of the concept of democracy and democratic practices. Put another way, we believe that the multifaceted concept of democracy identified here is current, relevant, well-established, defensible from different disciplines, comprehensive and at the same time committed and ambitious, the precise opposite of the simplicity, ambiguity, laxness –and in some cases, the banality– that we denounced in the introduction. In short, it is far from the vacuity referred to by Wendy Brown (2011: 44) and from what, according to Nancy (2011: 58), was a signifier without meaning.

Undoubtedly, the multifaceted conception of educational democracy that has been presented here can be controversial. We would even dare to say that it should be, especially if we want to take it as a starting point to analyze what a democratic education or school should be. The possibility to translate the different dimensions of the concept of democracy to the educational sphere allows us to establish broad (but at the same time coherent) and ambitious criteria to work on the analysis and proposals of what has come to be called the "democratic quality" of our schools. We understand that with the delimitation of the concept we have proposed it is possible to analyze the coherence of heterogeneous and seemingly disparate practices and proposals, such that it is easier to establish what we mean when we talk about democracy in education or which aspects we should pay attention to and which aspects we can influence to contribute to improving the democratic quality of schools.

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