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CONDITIONS THAT FACILITATE STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

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The article highlights the importance of creating a motivating, accessible, and student-centered educational environment that fosters students' active participation in both the learning process and school life. It analyzes key conditions for meaningful participation, including trust-based relationships between students and teachers, adaptation of educational content to students' needs and interests, diversification of learning activities, and the development of autonomy, initiative, and responsibility. The study also examines the conditions through the lens of major participation theories and a set of standards on student participation in democratic decision-making process. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of informing students about opportunities for involvement and the need for continuous teacher training to support a participatory and inclusive educational climate.

Keywords: *participation, autonomy, student-teacher relationship, participation models, participation standard, decision-making process, participation condition.*

CONDIȚII CARE FACILITEAZĂ PARTICIPAREA ELEVILOR ÎN PROCESELE DECIZIONALE DEMOCRATICE

Articolul evidențiază importanța creării unui mediu educațional motivant, accesibil și centrat pe elev, care să stimuleze participarea activă a elevilor atât în procesul de învățare, cât și în viața școlii. Sunt analizate condițiile-cheie ale participării semnificative, inclusiv dezvoltarea relațiilor bazate pe încredere între elevi și cadrele didactice, adaptarea conținuturilor educaționale la nevoile și interesele elevilor, diversificarea activităților de învățare, precum și dezvoltarea autonomiei, inițiativei și responsabilității. Studiul examinează, de asemenea, condițiile prin prisma principalelor teorii ale participării și a unui set de standarde privind participarea elevilor în procesele decizionale democratice. Totodată, subliniază importanța informării elevilor despre oportunitățile de implicare și necesitatea formării continue a cadrelor didactice pentru susținerea unui climat educațional participativ și incluziv.

Cuvinte-cheie: *participare, autonomie, relație elev-profesor, modele de participare, standard de participare, proces decizional, condiție de participare.*

Introduction

Student participation in democratic decision-making processes within schools requires the creation of an accessible, motivating, and friendly environment where students can truly feel involved. Contemporary approaches to educational governance emphasize the role of stakeholder participation – students, teachers, parents, and the community – in the process of developing and implementing educational policies. Their active involvement contributes to increasing the relevance, transparency, and sustainability of educational decisions. In this regard, the specialized literature highlights that “participation is the cornerstone of effective strategies for education for all” [2]. This would imply equal access for all, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, academic performance, or disability, ensuring the process itself is supported with all necessary equipment, as well as spaces for organizing it, and promoting a positive climate where students feel welcomed, valued, appreciated, and heard. Participation is not reduced to mere behavioral involvement; rather, it is understood as a complex construct that integrates cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. It is directly correlated with motivation for learning, the development of competencies, and academic outcomes.

Methodological Framework

The methodology adopts a qualitative, conceptual-analytical approach, grounded in the interdisciplinary analysis of literature from the field of educational sciences, democratic theory, and international normative

frameworks concerning children's rights and student participation. The investigative process was oriented toward identifying and systematizing the conditions necessary for achieving meaningful student participation in school decision-making processes, understood as a complex process situated at the intersection of participation models, participation standards, institutional structures, and educational practices.

The analysis includes the study of relevant international normative documents, as well as conceptual frameworks underpinning student participation in education, with a focus on the right to expression and real influence in decision-making, in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In parallel, a thematic analysis of academic literature on student voice, participatory governance, and school democracy was conducted, with the aim of highlighting recurring patterns of participation and the conditions that support or limit it.

Based on these sources, a conceptual modeling approach was developed, aimed at articulating the interdependence between the axiological, pedagogical, institutional, and professional dimensions of student participation. Thus, axiological conditions were identified, associated with a democratic culture of respect and the recognition of the student as a rights-bearing subject; pedagogical conditions, reflected in interactive, student-centered teaching practices; institutional conditions, targeting the existence of functional and legitimate participatory structures, such as student councils; as well as professional conditions, referring to teachers' competencies to facilitate participation and support student autonomy.

Results Achieved

Theoretical Models of Participation

An important reference point in conceptualizing the conditions for student participation in decision-making processes lies in participation models that integrate perspectives from developmental psychology, the sociology of childhood, democratic theory, participatory education, and the child rights-based approach. The student engagement model proposed by J. Fredricks and Ph. Blumenfeld outlines three interdependent components: behavioral participation, which involves presence and engagement in tasks; emotional participation, expressed through interest and attachment to school; and cognitive participation, reflected in intellectual effort and learning strategies [8]. This model highlights that mere active presence does not guarantee authentic learning unless it is supported by affective involvement and deep cognitive processing.

From a constructivist perspective, L. Vygotsky emphasizes the role of social interaction and the "zone of proximal development" [22], suggesting that student participation is enhanced when tasks are adapted to their developmental level and carried out collaboratively. In this sense, participation becomes a socially mediated process, in which dialogue and cooperation are essential conditions.

At the same time, the democratic participation model promoted by R. Hart, known as the "ladder of participation" [10], highlights different levels of involvement, ranging from symbolic participation to genuine engagement, in which students contribute to decision-making. This model emphasizes the need to create an educational climate that values the student voice.

The concept of democratic participation in education, as developed by J. Dewey, places the student at the center of the educational process, assigning them an active role in constructing their own learning [6]. From this perspective, education is understood as a process of experiential learning, in which students' direct involvement in meaningful activities and in the life of the school community becomes essential. Participation is not merely a means of organizing teaching activities, but a fundamental pedagogical principle that contributes to the development of democratic competencies, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Thus, through active involvement in learning and decision-making processes, students become co-constructors of knowledge, and the school is transformed into a space of authentic democratic practice.

The child participation model developed by H. Shier proposes a complex approach to student involvement in democratic decision-making processes, structured into five progressive levels of participation: children are listened to, are supported to express their views, their views are taken into account, they are involved in decision-making processes, and, at the most advanced level, they share power and responsibility for decisions [18]. These levels reflect a progression from limited participation to meaningful participation, characterized by real influence on decisions. The model integrates three essential institutional

dimensions – opening, opportunity, and obligation – which highlight the extent to which educational institutions are prepared to support student participation. Thus, the model does not only describe levels of participation but also provides an analytical framework for assessing the institutional capacity to create real conditions for student involvement, contributing to the understanding of participation as a process dependent both on the willingness of educational actors and on the existence of clear mechanisms and institutional commitments.

The child participation model developed by L. Lundy is considered one of the most applicable theoretical frameworks in education, as it operationalizes the child's right to be heard. Unlike hierarchical models, it structures participation around four interdependent conditions: space, voice, audience, and influence. The model highlights that authentic participation requires the creation of institutional conditions that provide students with safe opportunities for expression, support in formulating their views, adults willing to listen actively, and mechanisms through which expressed opinions can influence decisions [15]. Due to its practical and operational nature, the model enables the integration of student participation into the institutional management of schools, strengthening the child rights perspective and emphasizing that participation is an institutional responsibility rather than merely an optional pedagogical practice.

Thus, the concept of student participation can be analyzed through the lens of participation theories, establishing a significant correlation between key elements, levels of participation, essential conditions, and theoretical foundations. The table below systematizes, alongside the aspects mentioned above, the main essence of the models used in the context of student participation.

Table 1. Theoretical Models of Participation

Model	Author	Esence/key elements	Key values for the research
Democratic participation in education	John Dewey	Experiential learning and active engagement [7].	Participation is treated as a fundamental pedagogical principle, in which the student plays an active role in the learning process.
Self-Determination Theory	Edward Deci & Richard Ryan	Intrinsic motivation and optimal individual development are based on the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness [17].	Participation is directly proportional to the student's motivation and sense of responsibility.
Child participation model	Harry Shier	Five levels (<i>children are listened to, are supported to express their views, their views are taken into consideration, are involved in decision-making processes, and share power and responsibility for decisions</i>) and three institutional dimensions (<i>opening, opportunity, obligation</i>) [18].	The model not only describes the levels of student participation in democratic decision-making processes, but also indicates how prepared an institution is to support them.
Ladder of participation	Roger Hart	Eight levels of participation: <i>manipulation, decoration, tokenism, children are informed, consulted and informed, initiated by adults, shared decisions with children, initiated and led by children, and initiated by children with shared decisions with adults</i> [10].	The model transforms an abstract concept of participation into a concrete, measurable ladder with eight distinct levels. It allows the precise identification of the level at which student participation is situated within democratic decision-making processes in schools.
„Lundy” Model	Laura Lundy	Four dimensions: space, voice, audience, and influence [15].	The model clarifies the necessary conditions for authentic participation, not just its existence.

Standards of student participation in democratic decision-making processes in general education

Based on the results of the literature review and the main national and international policy documents on student participation, the system of **Standards of student participation in democratic decision-making processes in general education** was developed. This system is grounded in the identification of the necessary conditions for ensuring authentic student participation. The standards include four key domains designed to support schools in developing and implementing measures to uphold children's and young people's right to participate in democratic decision-making processes.

a. Management and democratic governance *refer to the set of requirements regarding institutional commitment, policy, structures, and key processes that ensure student participation in decision-making processes. The operationalization of this domain is achieved through the following requirements:*

- Institutional commitment to student participation in decision-making processes requires the school management team to promote a shared and coherent vision of student participation, and for leadership to consult students, parents, and staff on major decisions;
- An internal regulatory framework supportive of participation emphasizes that internal regulations include procedures on student participation, and that the school rules are developed in a participatory manner and operationalize democratic values in a dedicated chapter on student participation;
- Democratic student participation structures imply the existence of functional student bodies, student representation in institutional committees and councils, and a dedicated budget for the dimension of student participation.

b. Institutional capacity and professional development *include the range of conditions regarding the organization of key processes and the level of staff competence, so that student participation is supported through skills, resources, and collaboration. This domain includes the following dimensions:*

- Staff competence development through training programs on student participation;
- Mentoring, exchange of best practices, and learning communities refers to the existence of internal mentoring programs in the field of student participation, as well as functional professional learning communities, including topics related to student participation;
- Resources and partnerships for participation assumes that dedicated resources for student participation exist and that partnerships supporting student participation are in place;
- Equity and inclusion in participation involves the representation of vulnerable students and the accessibility of democratic processes.

c. Curriculum and educational process *refers to the group of requirements regarding the design and organization of curricular and extracurricular activities that develop participation competencies and create real contexts for student involvement. Within this domain, the following aspects are considered:*

- Student participation in curriculum development requires that lesson plans integrate competencies, content, and activities related to student participation;
- Participatory teaching and learning methods through the systematic use of participatory approaches;
- Participatory assessment through self-assessment and peer assessment;
- Community participation / school openness to the community through students' involvement in community-based projects.

d. Monitoring and evaluation *set out conditions and requirements for the continuous improvement of student participation. This domain includes the following requirements:*

- A monitoring system for participation, ensuring the collection of data on student participation;
- Student involvement in school evaluation, so that students take part in the institution's self-evaluation process;
- Reporting and transparency through the preparation of an annual report on student participation.

Overall, the presented domains outline the main components of the institutional framework necessary for promoting authentic student participation in decision-making processes. To ensure the practical applicability of this framework, each domain is structured through specific standards, operationalized via relevant indicators and descriptors that allow for the assessment of the level of student participation in decision-making processes. Furthermore, for each indicator, areas of institutional intervention are defined and con-

crete actions are proposed, aimed at ensuring the **conditions** necessary for authentic participation. In this regard, the developed system provides a coherent and applicable framework, facilitating both the diagnosis of existing practices and the guidance of educational interventions in order to achieve the standards related to the real involvement of students in the process of decision-making in education at school level.

Fundamental conditions of student participation

Authentic student participation in school decision-making processes requires a set of essential conditions, without which it risks remaining a formal exercise lacking real impact. First, **axiological conditions** are indispensable, reflecting the internalization and practice of fundamental democratic values such as mutual respect, recognition of the child's dignity, and valuing students' opinions as a legitimate resource within the educational space, in accordance with the child rights principles promoted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Second, **pedagogical conditions** involve the use of interactive, student-centered teaching strategies that facilitate free expression, authentic dialogue, and the development of argumentation and decision-making skills. Complementarily, **institutional conditions** refer to the existence of functional and legitimate democratic structures, such as student councils, as well as clear mechanisms for consulting and integrating students' opinions into school decision-making processes, in line with the described models of authentic participation. Finally, **professional conditions** are crucial and relate to teachers' preparation to assume the role of facilitators of participation, the development of democratic communication skills, and the adoption of open attitudes toward student voice, aspects also supported by motivational perspectives that emphasize the importance of autonomy and relatedness in students' active engagement. Thus, authentic participation is shaped as the result of the interdependence of these fundamental dimensions, which ensure the transition from formal participation to real and meaningful involvement in school life.

James P. Comer emphasizes the importance of **authentic relationships between teachers, parents, and students for educational success**, stating that “no significant learning takes place without a significant relationship” [4]. In J. Comer's view, the neurological architecture of learning is conditioned by emotional safety, highlighting the importance of the relational triad: student – teacher – parent. When a student perceives the school environment as hostile or indifferent, the brain activates the limbic system, prioritizing survival through defensive mechanisms such as withdrawal or aggression, at the expense of the executive functions of the prefrontal cortex, which are necessary for complex information processing. The teacher is not merely a content provider, but also a substitute attachment figure. When the student feels that the teacher cares, intrinsic motivation emerges. J. Comer argues that parents must be equal partners, not just passive attendees at meetings. If there is a conflict or disconnect between home values and school values, the child experiences cognitive dissonance that hinders their progress. Educational success is not defined solely by grades, but also by the internalization of community values and the ability to navigate social environments.

Also, “when students believe that their abilities can be developed, they participate more enthusiastically in learning, demonstrate greater perseverance, and achieve better results” [11]. An educational framework that supports the development of students' competencies through constructive feedback and encouragement of effort creates conditions for meaningful and authentic student participation. Thus, their involvement is not only driven by external motivation such as grades or praise, but also represents an expression of interest and responsibility toward their own learning process.

Student participation, according to K. Robinson, is deeply influenced by the relevance of the activities in which they are engaged, particularly when these align with their interests, curiosity, and needs. “Students learn best when they are actively engaged in the process and when their talents and interests are recognized and valued” [16]. Education must be shaped by the current context, actively involving students.

“If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow,” [7, p. 79] wrote J. Dewey. We observe that everything is changing rapidly – technology, information, and labor market demands are very different from the past. If teachers use the same outdated methods without adaptation, students will not be prepared for today's reality. Each generation has different needs, interests, and learn-

ing styles. At the same time, today's students are more connected to technology and accustomed to fast, interactive information. Therefore, traditional methods must be complemented with modern, creative, and practical approaches. Education should not remain rigid. If it does not adapt, it limits students and reduces their chances of future success. Teachers have the responsibility to prepare students for "tomorrow," not for "yesterday" [6].

Another important condition in ensuring student participation is teacher preparation. **Teachers require continuous training adapted to new educational demands.** Training programs should include interactive methods of working with students and the development of mentoring competencies to guide and encourage learners. Student participation in the educational process involves more than physical presence in a classroom; it implies cognitive, emotional, and social engagement. In this sense, the statement of M. Ionescu and V. Chis – "The instructional and learning activity, like any human action, is always situated within a specific and concrete context in which certain variables (factors, components, conditions) intervene. Some of these variables are well known, others identifiable; some can be kept under control and adapted to current needs..." [11] – this highlights the traditional organizational framework of the school, which, although effective from a logistical perspective, does not automatically guarantee active student participation. The organization into classes and lessons provides a necessary and predictable structure, facilitating the management of the educational process. However, meaningful student participation can only be ensured if this structure is complemented by student-centered pedagogical practices: differentiated instruction, interactive methods, and a positive student-teacher relationship. Thus, the lesson becomes a space for expression, collaboration, and initiative, and participation shifts from a formal obligation to a voluntary and valuable process for the student's personal development.

Structured and organized participation provides students with predictability, offers a familiar framework for learning, and creates conditions for ongoing monitoring and feedback. The Brazilian educator and philosopher P. Freire promotes the idea of participatory education in which the student plays the role of an active subject. "Education must begin with the resolution of the contradiction between teacher and student, through the reconciliation of the two poles of the contradiction, so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" [9].

Traditionally, the teacher is the one who provides knowledge, while the student merely receives it. This relationship creates a "contradiction," a distance between the one who knows and the one who learns. Reconciliation means bridging this gap between teacher and student through dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. The teacher is no longer an absolute authority but becomes open to learning as well – from students' questions, ideas, and experiences. At the same time, the student is no longer passive but actively participates, contributes, asks questions, and may even offer new perspectives.

Thus, both become simultaneously teachers and students: the teacher continuously learns and adapts, while the student assumes an active role in the learning process. We emphasize that effective education is based on collaboration and exchange of ideas, not rigid authority. Only in this way does the learning process become dynamic, authentic, and relevant for both sides. The organization of the learning process into classes supports participation through differentiated approaches to students, taking into account the methods used and the space allocated for students' expression, cooperation, and initiative.

As early as 1897, J. Dewey, in his renowned work *My Pedagogic Creed*, stated that "... school must represent life – life as real and vital to the child as that which he lives at home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground" [6]. This reflects the belief of the American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer that school should not be an isolated place of theoretical learning only, but an **active and authentic environment in which students directly participate in community life**. Dewey emphasizes the importance of involving students in relevant and meaningful activities that reflect their everyday reality.

To stimulate student involvement in the life of the educational institution, it is necessary to **diversify participation activities** so that they respond to their interests and needs. "The strategy of complete learning draws teachers' attention to the need for differentiated instruction, based on a deep understanding of the students in the class, including from a motivational, affective, and attitudinal perspective, and to finding optimal solutions for combining different forms of extrinsic motivation and the gradual development of

students' intrinsic motivation" [1]. The idea of the Romanian teacher I. Miron highlights the essential role of motivation and the adaptation of the educational process to students' individual needs in order to ensure their active participation.

Known for her significant contributions to psycho-pedagogy, E. Joita emphasizes the importance of adapting the educational process to the real needs of students. In her view, "learning becomes effective if the following principle is respected: the principle of knowing and respecting students' age-related and individual particularities" [13].

Artistic, cultural, sports, and scientific activities provide students with the opportunity to express themselves in a non-formal setting where they can assert their abilities and strengthen their self-confidence. Interdisciplinary projects, participation in thematic debates, round tables, and discussion workshops help develop students' critical thinking and creativity. An advantage of these processes is the use of various platforms, digital technologies, and online competitions.

Another essential condition, the pedagogical one, states that participation involves the development of students' competencies to engage responsibly and effectively. "What a child is able to do today in collaboration, tomorrow he will be able to do independently" [22, p. 87].

Students must develop argumentative communication skills based on clear evidence to support their message or advocacy, and they must know their rights and responsibilities as members of the educational community. "Students communicate with each other without constantly receiving feedback from the teacher, which develops their initiative and responsibility" [12]. The approach of the teacher I. Junca highlights the active role of students in the learning process, promoting the development of autonomy, responsibility, and critical thinking. The author emphasizes student participation as a key element in improving the quality of education.

In an educational environment, it is beneficial for students to develop the competence to ask relevant questions and to approach a topic from multiple perspectives, to distinguish between facts and opinions, and between credible and questionable sources of information, to make informed decisions based on analysis, and to assume responsibility for their choices. "Self-regulated learners are proactive in their learning efforts because they are aware of their strengths and limitations and because they are guided by personally set goals" [11].

To develop students' competence in autonomy and independence, it is important that they know how to set their own objectives, plan their time and resources, demonstrating good organizational skills, and show initiative by proposing their own ideas and suggestions for involvement in school life or, more broadly, in the community. "A successful school must involve all people, all strengths, and all capacities within it" [19], stated A. Hargreaves, known for promoting the active involvement of students, teachers, and the community in the learning process and in educational reform.

According to the UNICEF Romania Report from April 2025, "students experience a lack of trust from teachers regarding their decision-making capacity. In schools where students are actively involved, better cohesion, discipline, and reduced absenteeism are observed" [21]. Therefore, meaningful student participation is far from fully realized; there is a need for a transformation of the student participation culture, which would also ensure effective conditions for this process.

Consistent student involvement in decision-making processes can be achieved through various means, particularly through class councils, student councils, as well as the presence of student representatives in school councils and committees, where they can freely express their views on the development and implementation of school policies and codes of conduct.

The sociological study "Evaluation of barriers and obstacles to the participation of young people and adolescents in Moldova in decision-making processes" shows that an adequate level of information provided to students regarding opportunities for involvement in school life is a fundamental condition for ensuring their participation. Young people's access to relevant information about participation structures and mechanisms, both at local and national level, is influenced by social and institutional factors such as the effectiveness of communication channels, the duration and consistency of information campaigns, the actors involved in message delivery, and the quality of disseminated content [5].

Although various tools are used to inform young people, disparities are observed between different groups of students regarding access to information related to formal participation, highlighting the need for more inclusive and equitable strategies in the information process.

Eliminating generational differences is essential when discussing participation, as promoting relationships with people of different ages helps children feel less intimidated when they propose or critique the viewpoint of an older person and, conversely, helps adults become more accustomed to understanding children's language and to listening to their thoughts and perspectives as citizens. This quality, highlighted by participating children, promotes equal respect for children of all ages [10], mutual respect among all participants who support one another, and ultimately generates opportunities for the gradual development of dialogue skills [1].

Diversity is one of the conditions that can be approached from two perspectives. On the one hand, experiences should be inclusive, allowing everyone to participate under their own conditions, and the individual potential of each child should be valued so that all can participate without a sense of frustration. On the other hand, participatory methodologies not only help address this diversity but also support the identification of each child's specific abilities, thus enabling more adapted/ personalized intervention [11]. Working on diversity means ensuring that no one feels excluded and that everyone finds a role in which they feel comfortable. When education is based on participation and each child's needs are identified, improvements are also observed in other aspects of children's lives.

Seeing the impact of participation is a strong source of motivation, as students realize that their efforts have been worthwhile, that they have been heard, and that they have influenced a specific reality. L. Chawla identifies, as a condition for competence, that participation should lead to tangible results and that there should be opportunities to contribute, to play a role in decision-making, and in achieving objectives. If it cannot be guaranteed from the outset that children's participation will lead to change, their expectations should not be manipulated in order to make them more "realistic" [3].

The Recommendation of the Council of Europe also takes into account the condition that participation should have concrete consequences within a timeframe that is not too long for children. Participation is a process that is personally experienced and involves a significant degree of engagement. If this condition is not met, it becomes difficult to consolidate learning associated with participation, because participation is learned precisely through participation. The experience of participation should promote the subjective well-being of the children involved. It should be a pleasant framework in which students can enjoy themselves and have fun [20]. Regardless of the field in which they are involved, it is essential that they are enthusiastic and motivated by the activity. Participation should not be limited to entertainment; they must feel that they have a valuable role, that they are an integral part of the process, and that their contribution is essential to the success of the project. At the same time, an authentic space for participation supports the building of relationships – it becomes a place where new friendships are formed, sometimes among very different children.

The experience of children's participation should provide "gateway" opportunities to future participatory experiences; it should promote the continuity of all learning accumulated during childhood related to participation, rather than being limited to a specific reality that ends with childhood. Beyond the characteristics that children consider essential for their participatory experiences, they generally express a desire for greater responsibility, calling on adults to trust their capabilities and recognize that they can be actively involved in all aspects of these experiences [14]. They request to be involved in managing financial resources, time management, logistical issues, etc., which are still typically considered adult responsibilities.

Conclusions

To ensure meaningful student participation in school decision-making processes, it is necessary to have a coherent set of interdependent conditions that go beyond the mere formal openness to their involvement. In this sense, real participation is grounded in axiological conditions, which concern democratic values such as respect, equity, recognition of students' voices, and their acknowledgment as relevant social actors within the educational space.

In addition, pedagogical conditions are indispensable, involving student-centered teaching practices, participatory learning methods, authentic communication, and the development of expression and argumentation skills. Furthermore, authentic participation depends on institutional conditions, reflected in school policies, open decision-making structures, and functional mechanisms for consulting and involving students. Last but not least, professional conditions play an essential role, including teachers' competencies in facilitating participation, positive attitudes toward dialogue, and the ability to transform student participation into a real, consistent, and sustainable educational process.

Thus, authentic participation emerges as the result of the interaction among these four fundamental dimensions, ensuring coherence and effectiveness in the participatory decision-making process within schools. Ultimately, it is important that this space provides students with the feeling that they are heard and that they can express themselves freely, distancing themselves from adult authority structures that dominate other aspects of their daily lives.

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