

Datas comemorativas na Educação Infantil: reflexões a partir da Abordagem do Ciclo de Políticas

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Resumo

Este artigo é fruto de uma pesquisa realizada junto a professores da educação infantil da rede pública de um município sul-riograndense. A temática explorada versa sobre a visão desses professores a respeito do currículo, a fim de compreender suas formas de perceber e interagir com as políticas curriculares, relacionando suas percepções aos seus contextos de prática, a partir dos resultados obtidos. Pesquisa quali-quantitativa, empreendida a partir de um levantamento, a fim de testar a hipótese sobre a prevalência nas escolas de educação infantil de datas comemorativas do ano a guiar os planejamentos e os projetos nas escolas, tendo como objetivo aprofundar as questões emergentes do contexto pesquisado, a partir da ótica da abordagem do ciclo de políticas. Os dados obtidos, assim como de outras pesquisas semelhantes, denunciam o caráter empobrecido das práticas pedagógicas ancoradas nas efemérides. Salienta-se que o professor não é alocado como responsável / culpado por este contexto.

Palavras-chave: Currículo. Datas comemorativas. Educação da criança. Políticas públicas em educação. Prática docente.

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Commemorative dates in Early Childhood Education: reflections from the Policy Cycle Approach

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Abstract

This article is the result of a study conducted with early childhood education teachers from the public school system of a municipality in Rio Grande do Sul. The theme explored is the view of these teachers regarding the curriculum, in order to understand their ways of perceiving and interacting with curricular policies, relating their perceptions to their contexts of practice, based on the results obtained. This is a qualitative and quantitative research, undertaken based on a survey, to test the hypothesis about the prevalence in early childhood education schools of commemorative dates of the year to guide planning and projects in schools, with the aim to deepen the emerging issues of the researched context, from the perspective of the policy cycle approach. The data obtained, as well as other similar studies, denounce the impoverished nature of pedagogical practices anchored in ephemerides. It is emphasized that the teacher is not held accountable for this context.

Keywords: Curriculum. Commemorative dates. Early childhood education. Public education policies. Teaching practice.

Fechas comemorativas em Educação Infantil: reflexiones desde el Abordaje del Ciclo de Políticas

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Resumen

Este artículo es el resultado de una investigación desarrollada con docentes de educación infantil del sistema escolar público de un municipio brasileño. El tema explorado se refiere a las visiones de estos docentes sobre el currículo, con el fin de comprender sus formas de percibir e interactuar con las políticas curriculares, relacionando sus percepciones con sus contextos de práctica. Investigación cuali-cuantitativa, realizada con el objetivo de probar la hipótesis sobre la prevalencia en las escuelas de educación infantil de fechas conmemorativas del año para orientar la planificación y proyectos en las escuelas, con la finalidad de profundizar las problemáticas que emergen del contexto investigado, desde la perspectiva del abordaje del ciclo de políticas. Los datos obtenidos, así como los de otras investigaciones similares, denuncian el carácter empobrecido de las prácticas pedagógicas ancladas en efemérides. Cabe señalar que el docente no es considerado responsable/culpable en este contexto.

Palabras clave: Currículo. Educación Infantil. Fechas conmemorativas. Políticas públicas en educación. Práctica docente.

Introduction

This article was developed based on a survey conducted among the teaching staff of the public early childhood education (ECE) network in a city in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The investigation explores teachers' perceptions regarding the ECE curriculum, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of how they perceive and interact with curricular policies, as well as to relate their perceptions to their practical contexts based on the quantitative results obtained.

To guide the inferences and discussions, the study draws on the policy cycle theory by Stephen J. Ball and collaborators as a theoretical and methodological framework. This approach facilitates the examination of the macro and micropolitical contexts involved in the trajectory of educational curricular policies, from the initial efforts and disputes regarding policy influence to the development of policy texts themselves, culminating in an analysis of teachers' "performances" based on these texts, that is, the context of practice.

This text prioritizes highlighting a single question from the survey, deemed essential and central to the entire research. This question addresses the prevalence of commemorative dates in the calendar, which serve as a curriculum and a primary thematic agenda for project organization in early childhood education schools. Given the significant data obtained, it is considered that incorporating these results into the other survey questions would constrain the discussions to superficiality, as described in the methodology section. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge that it is impossible to exhaust all the complexities raised within the scope of a single article.

Another important reason for highlighting this question among the others is that it was designed to test an independent hypothesis, specifically to verify whether the presence of commemorative dates continues to guide lesson planning and projects in early childhood education schools in the municipality. Other research has also pointed to the prevalence of this impoverished pedagogical practice in various settings. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether the hypothesis is confirmed in the researched context and, based on the results, to examine the emerging issues of the observed reality. This is approached from a non-simplistic and unyielding perspective, avoiding placing blame on teachers for this scenario. Instead, the focus is on understanding the complexity of all the intersections and interests involved, which stretch the policies and their meanings until they reach the ground of the school.

Methodology

This article originated from the responses to a specific question included in a questionnaire answered by teachers from municipal early childhood education schools in a municipality in the western border region of Rio Grande do Sul. This questionnaire is part of a research project conducted with these teachers and consists of a total of fourteen questions. It is important to clarify, however, that the reason a specific question was selected to form the basis of this study is not an attempt to slice the research into multiple outputs, which would constitute the condemnable practice of salami slicing.

The objectives for deriving an independent article from the data related to this question stem from the fact that the question was conceived based on its own hypothesis and designed to confirm or refute that hypothesis. Another objective relates to the volume of data obtained from the research, as this question alone provides sufficient material for a separate publication. Therefore, if its analysis were combined with the other thirteen questions, the results would be mentioned so briefly that it would deprive researchers and teachers interested in the topic of a more detailed understanding of the essence of this reality, its implications for teaching practice, and its contributions to research in the field.

All authors and researchers involved in producing this study carefully analyzed the available options for data analysis and chose to develop and present these results separately. It is believed that the contribution to the academic community is more significant than any potential misinterpretation regarding the researchers' intentions, who did not receive any financial incentives for this research and have no interests in this format of presentation other than the most effective way to benefit all those interested in this focus of study.

According to Maia,

It has become conventional to refer to “Salami Science” or “Salami Slicing” as the publication of two or more articles derived from a single research database, meaning from one investigation. However, this is a simplistic or even naïve definition, and an experienced evaluator should consider other criteria before concluding that unethical slicing has occurred in scientific production (MAIA, 2017, p. 01).

In considering the possibility of analyzing the present study from different criteria, we consciously opted for this type of presentation. With these initial considerations made, it is important to describe the methodological path taken thus far.

The research was conducted using a qualitative-quantitative approach, following the perspective developed by Pereira and Ortigão (2016) that the production of quantitative data

complements and promotes issues and research grounded in qualitative theories, and vice versa. Since it does not constitute immediate application research, it is classified as basic research (TUMELERO, 2019). In terms of objectives, the research is characterized as exploratory and descriptive, in alignment with Gil (2010, p. 28), who notes, “There are, however, researches that, although defined as descriptive based on their objectives, end up serving more to provide a new perspective on the problem, which brings them closer to exploratory research.

The main hypothesis to be tested with this question specifically sought to ascertain whether the presence of commemorative dates continues to guide lesson planning and projects in early childhood education schools in the municipality. To define a research instrument capable of producing information aligned with the investigated hypothesis, a survey (GIL, 2010) was conducted, featuring an objective question with pre-prepared descriptive responses and the option to add comments on the topic at the end of the alternatives.

This question has the potential to provide a rich, independent, and relevant analysis and discussion for scholars and professionals involved in early childhood education studies, and it can be considered extremely relevant for supporting studies on the ECE curriculum, teacher training, educational policies, teacher autonomy, among others. The question, transcribed in the following section, inquires about the presence of annual commemorative dates as the main themes that generate teaching plans and projects in early childhood education schools.

Based on the information produced from the analysis of the obtained responses, a descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data collected was performed, using a graph generated from the responses, with the aid of Microsoft Excel software.

Research context, Population, and Sample

The research was conducted in a municipality located in the western border region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The total population of the study consisted of the female teachers from public early childhood education (ECE) in the municipality, including those from municipal early childhood education schools (EMEIs) and those from elementary schools (EMEFs). In total, the municipality offers six EMEIs, catering to children from nursery to pre-school, and nine EMEFs, which provide pre-school classes I and II, thereby complementing the availability of early childhood education for local residents. However, although the municipal management also utilizes the facilities of elementary schools to supplement early childhood

education offerings, the staffing and overall management of pre-schools remain linked to the EMEIs and the educational department responsible for managing ECE.

The total number of teachers assigned to early childhood education in the municipality is 55 (fifty-five) teachers. From this total, the inclusion criteria for the research considered only those teachers who served as classroom teachers in early childhood education during the year 2022. As for the exclusion criteria, the participation of teachers in management positions within early childhood education during the same year was not counted. Out of the total of fifty-five teachers, excluding those in management roles, thirty-six teachers participated in the research by responding to the proposed question, a percentage that represents an extremely significant sample of the investigated reality.

Ethical Principles

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical principles for research involving human subjects, as established by Resolution 510/2016, which states that it “[...] lays out the norms applicable to research in the Human and Social Sciences whose methodological procedures involve the use of data directly obtained from participants or identifiable information that may pose greater risks [...]” (BRAZIL, 2016, p. 01). Therefore, it was approved by the ethics committee of the researchers' affiliated institution and registered under the number 6.043.528.

All participants in the research signed the informed consent form (ICF), and to conduct the study ethically and transparently, the researchers also made a preliminary presentation using a multimedia projector. This presentation aimed to describe all the stages of the process, the theme of the investigation, the instrument to be used, as well as the importance and content of the ICF, prior to the signing of the terms and the distribution of any questionnaires.

After fulfilling the ethical requirements, all early childhood education teachers in the municipality were gathered in an opportunity provided by the municipal education department. The questionnaires were completed in person in the presence of the researchers. Care was taken to ensure the anonymity of the respondents upon distributing the questionnaires and to exclude participants according to the criteria previously outlined.

Results and discussions

The question formulated by the team to gather the desired information, in order to assess the validity of the hypothesis, is transcribed below, along with the proposed alternatives:

“Do commemorative dates (such as: Tiradentes Day, Water Day, Environment Day, Folklore Day, Indigenous Peoples Day, etc.) play a part, in any way, in the curriculum to be taught in class?

a. () No, very few commemorative dates are addressed in class. When they are included, it is based on each teacher's personal decision, not as a suggestion from local or general management.

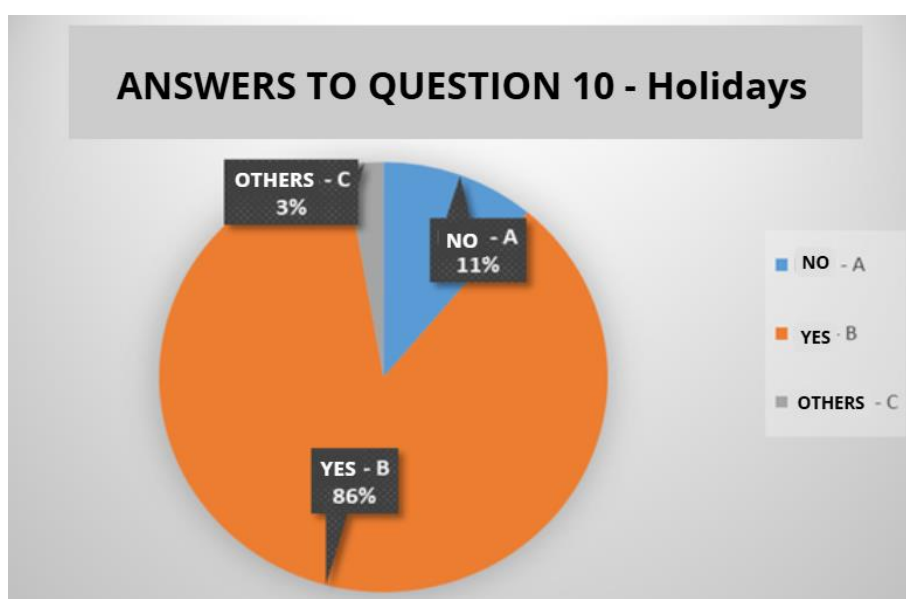
b. () Yes, in your school, the curriculum progressively incorporates the commemorative dates from the calendar, and typically, these dates serve as the basis for the themes to be addressed (e.g., Water Day, Environment Day, Indigenous Peoples Day, Folklore Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Book Day, etc.).

c. () Others:

Would you like to make any remarks about this question?”

The question was answered by 36 (thirty-six) early childhood education teachers from the municipality, a figure that currently represents 65.45% of the teachers at this educational level. Since all teachers who held management positions in 2022, whether as directors, supervisors, or coordinators, were excluded from the study, and considering the total number of teachers in this stage, including those in management roles, which is 55 (fifty-five), according to information from the municipal education department, it is evident that the obtained sample represents a significant and powerful percentage for analysis and discussions. For better interpretation, below is the graph generated by Excel showing the responses to the question transcribed above:

Graph 1 - Generated with the responses to the question transcribed above.



Source: Authors(2023).

The strength of the 'yes' visible in the graph, reflecting a majority choice in affirming that 'in the school, the curriculum progressively incorporates the commemorative dates from the calendar, and generally, these dates serve as the basis for the themes to be addressed,' clearly demonstrates that there are ample reasons for researchers and professionals in the field to engage in studies and work involving the early childhood education curriculum, educational management activities, educational policies, teacher training, and the autonomy and freedom of teachers' practices, among other relevant topics.

The primary justification for writing an independent text on the responses to this question is that if the discussion regarding it were combined with the other questions in the research, it would need to be abbreviated and superficialized. However, even an entire article focused solely on this question will yield little, without a doubt, in bringing to light all the implications of its impact on the different levels already mentioned management, educational policies, training, practice, autonomy, etc.

Therefore, some inferences will be made and discussed; however, it is not intended to exhaust the topic due to the complexity and breadth of the possibilities for analysis and reflection it raises. It should be emphatically noted that before any considerations, it is important to clarify that any criticism that may be directed at the researched context is not a critique of the teachers who participated in the study and who are on the ground in the schools, implementing educational policies that have already been filtered and stretched by many intersections.

It is indeed true that, as pointed out by Santos, Borges, and Lopes (2019),

There are trends underway that circulate as teacher accountability and significantly mobilize discussions in the field of education as a whole, and particularly in teacher training, as well as in the areas of curriculum and educational policies, both at the national level and in an international context (SANTOS; BORGES; LOPES, 2019, p. 248).

However, the perspectives and reflections raised in this investigation are not aligned with, nor do they conform to, the discourses of teacher accountability or blame. This debate is broad and fundamental, and it cannot be overlooked. However, since this article is an excerpt from a larger study that provides more suitable spaces for these discussions, it does not aim to delve deeply into these issues here. Still, it is important to acknowledge and document that many choices in the field of educational policies made in Brazil demonstrate a shallow and savior-like conception of education,

based on prescriptions that ultimately place the teacher in the role of someone who must follow a script to transform the educational reality of the country.

These prescriptive political orientations, which aim to address the entire complexity of education in a country of continental proportions like Brazil, through curricular and training manuals with prescriptive biases, have been criticized by many Brazilian and even international researchers and educators, such as Mello and Salomão de Freitas (2019), Santos, Borges, and Lopes (2019), Lopes (2020), Ceschini et al. (2022), Cunha and Lopes (2022), and Apple (2019), to name just a few.

With a less naive analysis, it is possible to observe that policies for teacher training in Brazil have been modified since the introduction of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC-2019), indicating a very close alignment between the documents. The BNCC standardizes the curricular policy for all basic education, and subsequent policy texts have been influenced by it, promoting an alignment of Brazilian education with neoliberal, conservative, and performative principles established by international financial organizations (CESCHINI *et al.* 2022).

This scenario has also been highlighted by Carvalho, Nascimento, and Marcos in their literature review on the BNCC for Early Childhood Education:

The individuals involved in the development of the document [BNCC-I], along with the role played by the Movement for the Base, which shifts from supporter in the initial versions to managers of the Base in the final version, clearly demonstrate whom the BNCC aims to serve: the interests of the market” (CARVALHO; NASCIMENTO; MARCOS, 2023, p. 18).

Having made these important reservations, which are undoubtedly essential to the proposed debate, it is possible to proceed with the proposed investigation analyzing the results of the survey conducted with early childhood education teachers and the curricular educational policies, from the perspective and theoretical-methodological framework of Stephen J. Ball's continuous policy cycle approach.

The Analysis of Stephen Ball's Policy Cycle and Curricular Educational Policies

With a careful reading up to this point, one quickly notices the reiteration of the term 'educational policies' as an important reference for interpreting the analyzed context. This recognition undoubtedly invites debate and brings to light the contributions of sociologist Stephen Ball, particularly through his policy cycle approach. Ball's theory of educational policy analysis, as noted by Santos (2016), clarifies that policies are not constructed solely in environments separate from

schools and then simply implemented in educational institutions. 'Policies are constructed, given meaning in different cycles, and redefined through the actions of agents operating within schools and the historical-cultural conditions present there' (SANTOS, 2016, p.03).

The investigative path outlined by Stephen J. Ball and collaborators (BOWE; BALL; GOLD, 1992; BALL; BOWE, 1992; BALL, 1994) provides a solid foundation for research focused on examining the stages that comprise the continuous cycle of educational policies, as well as for studies dedicated to exploring one of the stages of this continuum in greater detail. This is the case for this article, as it highlights the question at hand for a more detailed examination, directing the main focus to the final link of the policy cycle, namely the moment when educational policies, and in this case curricular ones, come into play through the "actions" of teachers, the "context of practice."

It should be noted, however, that even though there is a privileged focus on this last phase of policy cycle analysis, the earlier phases are not excluded from interpretations. As highlighted by Mainardes, "[...] all dimensions are quite useful for policy analysis, as they guide the researcher in identifying the intervening aspects in the process of putting policies into action within the context of practice [...]" (2018, p. 05). The inclusion of all spheres of the policy cycle in the analysis of educational policies, even when there is a focus on the context of practice, is also emphasized by Lopes and Macedo: "[...] the context of practice is productive, but it cannot be understood outside the constraints established by the restructured, redistributed, and recreated power relations shaped by policies [...]" (2011, p. 261).

And what is the perceived implication between educational policies and the discussion regarding the analyzed question? The implication exists at all levels, as, no matter how much criticism the national guidelines or curricular orientations may receive (and it is important to always maintain a critical perspective toward curricular policies), it is also necessary to acknowledge that commemorative dates do not appear in any of these documents, not even as suggestions. If they are introduced in schools as guides for the curricular pathway, it is due to a series of factors and intersections that occur along the way between educational policy for early childhood curriculum and the schools, as well as the reconfigurations they undergo upon arriving at the school.

As noted by Lazaretti and Arrais (2018), the presence of commemorative dates in the curricular organization of early childhood education is rooted in the non-formal and non-school origins of care for young children, during a time when the curricular issue was not a priority. Even after the publication of various guiding documents for the early childhood curriculum over the years, such as the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education – RCNEI (1998), the

National Quality Parameters for Early Childhood Education (2006), the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education – DCNEI (2010), and the National Common Curricular Base for Early Childhood Education - BNCC-EI (2017), the prevalence of commemorative dates as an explicit thematic curricular sequence clearly indicates that policies are not simply 'implemented'; rather, there are secondary adjustments, translations, interpretations, and reinterpretations. (MAINARDES, 2018).

Lira, Dominico, and Martins (2018) also expressed their concerns regarding the presence of commemorative dates in educational institutions. The authors emphasize that there is a lack of clarity about their place in planning and the meaning and significance that all practices associated with them would have for children. Nonetheless, as they also point out, in both public and private institutions, 'it has become normalized to mandate that work with commemorative dates be included in planning and projects (LIRA; DOMINICO; MARTINS, 2018, p. 03)''.

Nascimento (2022), in his graduation thesis focusing on commemorative dates in early childhood education, cites two authors who have also researched and written on the subject: Ostetto (2000) and Maia (2011). The author reflects that, despite the decade-long gap between the works of the mentioned authors, no changes or abandonment of commemorative dates as a curricular focus in early childhood education have been observed. It is truly remarkable to note that, 23 (twenty-three) years after Ostetto's publication, researchers in early childhood education across different regions of the country continue to observe and denounce this impoverished pedagogical scenario where commemorative dates remain at the center of the early childhood curriculum. As early as 2000, Ostetto stated:

The educator ends up becoming a repeater, as the same experience is repeated every year with the recurring dates. Perhaps one activity here or another there, or a minor project may be refreshed, but the backdrop remains the same. In terms of pedagogical implications, this perspective becomes tedious as it is fulfilled year after year, which does not broaden the child's cultural repertoire. It mass-produces and impoverishes knowledge, while also underestimating the child's ability to transcend that fragmented and infantilized knowledge (OSTETTO, 2000, p. 182).

This repetitive and tedious repertoire of commemorative dates as themes to be studied in early childhood education, year after year, limits the children's developmental possibilities. These types of projects, judged by the most commonly addressed dates, appear to be decontextualized and disconnected from the realities of the children, and at times, even distressing, as is the case in schools

that celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day without any prior verification of whether the children have a mother or father, or regardless of this information.

Indeed, there are many implications of a pedagogical practice grounded in a conception of the child that stems from a time when early childhood schools had a merely assistentialist character. When reflecting on these issues, one lingering question remains: How is this prevalence possible? What pathways traversed by educational policies have favored or supported this emptiness of meaning in curricular journeys?

In observing this scenario and reflecting on the raised questions, the contributions of Ball and collaborators, through their proposal of the policy cycle approach, provide important tools for analyzing the entire journey of a curricular policy. Starting from the observation of the different voices, with varying degrees of power and influence, that initially drive reflections and decision-making, moving through the construction of normative texts, and not only these but also promotional texts, advertisements, news articles, etc., which seek to favor the pathway and make the final texts more palatable, and finally, to observing the reception and 'performance' of professionals based on these texts in practice.

When focusing on the last dimension of the policy cycle, that is, the context of practice, it is not difficult to recognize that teaching practice is a multifaceted reality, with each aspect playing an extremely important role in this mosaic of influences, possibilities, interferences, aggravations, and resistances distinct and crucial elements of this complex scenario. There would not be enough space in this text to accurately and justly describe the numerous factors that influence professional teaching practice.

Among these, one can first mention those with greater breadth and resonance in an initial approach, such as initial teacher training, which is often so fragmented, decontextualized, and lacking in critical tensions regarding the realities of schools, visibly permeated by various challenges. This aligns with the question posed by Bernadetti Gatti in her research, which asks whether the 'panoramic and fragmented, reduced training found in the curricula of these teacher education programs is sufficient for future teachers to plan, teach, assess, or guide teaching activities in basic education?' (GATTI, 2014, p.40).

Initial teacher training is a fundamental milestone in preparing educators. The prevalence of undergraduate programs that offer future teachers a collection of disconnected and meaningless content, which do not stimulate critical thinking or the ability to analyze the macro and micropolitical contexts involved often favoring educational fads and focusing primarily on methodologies pushes

to the background, or even completely neglects, the human specificity of teaching work. This includes recognizing their role with the children and young people they interact with, understanding their contexts and life conditions, and ultimately failing to construct a holistic view of teaching with the students. Such programs undoubtedly contribute significantly to the occurrence of undesirable practices. As denounced by Giroux twenty-six years ago, 'instead of learning to reflect on the principles that structure life and practice in the classroom, future teachers learn methodologies that seem to negate the very need for critical thinking' (1997, p. 159).

This thought by Giroux is also supported today by educational thinkers and researchers, such as Marta Regina Furlan de Oliveira, in her work titled 'The (De)Authority of Pedagogy in Training Spaces for Early Childhood: From Tradition to Modernity':

It is important to consider that reflective and critical thinking is an inherent and driving element of pedagogical activity. However, due to the fascination with technological processes, the degeneration of reflective thinking threatens the ethical content of the educational process because of its social determination (OLIVEIRA, 2019, p. 86).

As the author points out, legitimate pedagogical activity requires professionals and researchers to maintain a critical perspective on everything before them, whether it be the structural reality of the school, the school community, the curriculum, etc. Clearly, in emphasizing the need for a critical approach to the complexity surrounding educational issues, there is a call to abandon superficiality and deepen reflections, in an effort to support the transformation of realities through the constructive potential of criticism, rather than merely resorting to unproductive negativity.

Another factor that comes to mind is continued education, which often manifests as isolated moments of content delivery in a completely banking manner, in the Freirean sense. These contents, often chosen arbitrarily, frequently do not engage with the realities faced by these teachers, resulting in isolated events that are entirely incapable of provoking real mobilizations, destabilizations, or the incorporation of new perspectives and possibilities for doing things differently, and seeking viable innovations within the school context in which they are situated.

Equally important as training, another highly relevant factor in the analysis of teaching practice is the appreciation of the teacher. The value placed on teachers inherently engenders different aspects and possibilities for examination. Undoubtedly, when reflecting on this factor, the first idea that arises is the financial aspect. There is no country that takes education seriously and reaps its benefits without financially valuing the professionals who dedicate years of their working lives to

teaching the children and youth of their nation. Investing in teachers is, quite literally, investing in the future of a nation and in a country's development project.

Another indispensable element regarding the appreciation of teachers, which is no less important, is recognizing the teaching professional as an intellectual. It is crucial to emphasize this expression 'no less important,' because, as previously mentioned, the facets that make up the mosaic of teaching practice are plural and significant, and all are relevant. As a professional valued for their intellectual contributions, for their ability to establish connections between theories, practices, and contexts, and for their sophisticated elaborative and argumentative skills, the teacher especially one who is in the classroom should be the first consulted and highly regarded when it comes to drafting policy texts.

With this in mind, we can return to Ball (2016) and his description of the contexts of influence that first intervene in educational policies. If teachers were valued intellectually, and if educational policies were genuinely designed to transform realities and contexts, the construction of education policies would not be top-down; rather, it would involve a movement from the ground up, seeking potentials and possibilities for real and feasible transformations of the existing realities in the various regions of the country.

However, the analyses demonstrate that curricular educational policies are influenced and intersected by groups and individuals with different interests in education, particularly economic ones, who are close to and hold power over political actors. This is the first context in Ball's proposed policy cycle analysis: the 'context of influence.' 'It is in this context that interest groups compete to influence the definition of the social purposes of education and what it means to be educated. Social networks operate within and around political parties, government, and the legislative process' (MAINARDES, 2006, p. 05).

Another fundamental aspect that interferes with teaching practice is the structural and material conditions of schools. In many educational spaces in Brazil, there are minimal conditions for the development of adequate pedagogical work. Therefore, when observing the context of teaching practice, it is essential to consider the conditions under which these teachers meet with their students. In many cases, the structural and material precariousness is so significant that it ultimately dictates educational practice, overshadowing relational and pedagogical spheres.

As can be seen, even in an initial approach that seeks to consider which aspects are intertwined in the analysis of the context of teaching practice, various and important factors quickly emerge. It would not be possible, within the scope of a single article, to describe all the aspects that affect

teaching practice. However, a few more can be mentioned, without the intention of exhausting the list: arbitrary choices by school managers appointed by the municipal government, who often lack the training and experience to occupy these positions; relational difficulties and conflicts that may arise in daily life, for which there may not be an appropriate conflict resolution culture; overcrowding; a shortage of professionals; the absence of a multidisciplinary support team; lack of time for planning; in short, the multifaceted mosaic of teaching practice truly occupies a central place in the investigation.

All these factors have also been considered by the authors of the policy cycle approach: '[...] material, structural, and relational aspects need to be incorporated into policy analysis in order to better understand how policies operate within institutions' (BALL; MAGUIRE; BRAUN, 2016, p. 21). Jefferson Mainardes, a researcher in the policy cycle and an advocate for Ball's studies in Brazil, also makes this reference: 'In policy analysis, it is necessary to consider a series of contextual dimensions: situated contexts; professional cultures; material contexts; and external contexts' (2018, p. 05).

Regarding the aspects and particularities that interfere with and overlap the context of school practice, one factor deserves special mention in this text, not because it is considered the most important since, as emphasized, all tones of this mixture are essential but due to the purpose of this article, which is to investigate '[...] whether the presence of commemorative dates continues to guide lesson planning and projects in early childhood education schools in the municipality.' This aspect is cultural. The educational heritage of a school, an education department, or a teaching collective plays a significant role in the interaction with the curriculum and in teaching practice. The '[...] cultural conditioning of the ways of conceiving the curriculum is of decisive importance in forming an adequate understanding of what it entails and in how it is organized' (RAD-CAMAYD; LEY-LEYVA, 2023, p. 343).

The culture of a school, and of a collective of teachers, is a powerful influence on teachers' practice. Within the school, professionals with varying years of experience, training from different eras, and teachers with and without higher education, all with worldviews shaped by different times, work simultaneously. Thus, one would expect that there would be many epistemological discussions in the school regarding the curriculum, planning, programming, and indeed all matters related to the profession. However, what is often observed is that older traditions exert a strong influence on pedagogical practices, as breaking away from deeply rooted cultural legacies in various settings is

quite challenging. It requires courage, reflective and discursive abilities, critical thinking, and, most importantly, a willingness to abandon a comfort zone, which likely creates discomfort and animosity with colleagues and superiors. In the corner of their classroom, a teacher often feels small, isolated, and incapable of transcending these well-defined boundaries of cultural legacies.

A rich concept of school culture can be found in Frago:

A set of theories, ideas, principles, norms, rituals, inertia, agendas, habits, and practices of doing and thinking, mentalities and behaviors forms sedimented over time in the shape of traditions, regularities, and shared rules of the game among the actors in educational institutions. Traditions, regularities, and rules that are passed down from generation to generation and provide strategies for integrating into institutions, classrooms, daily tasks, and the demands and limitations that these tasks imply or endure consequences (FRAGO, 2001, p. 29).

A fundamental expression in Frago's concept is 'strategies for integrating into institutions.' When a teacher begins working at a school, they arrive with their own conceptions, training, and way of thinking about education and pedagogical practices. However, they enter a reality that is already in motion. The school was not at a standstill upon their arrival, waiting for their reflections and contributions; on the contrary, everything was already underway. Pedagogical conceptions, relational networks, planning, the curriculum, and often even the didactic sequence for the upcoming period or year are already established.

In observing this scenario, it becomes apparent how difficult it is for the cultural legacies of a school to be destabilized. For a teacher to avoid simply conforming to what is already in place at the school, they must take on various challenges that will not only manifest as dialogical struggles within the school, leading to heated discussions, but will also represent a personal challenge to accept the risk of being misunderstood, excluded, belittled, or even persecuted and dismissed. At this point, it is important to emphasize that it is not the individual actions of each teacher already part of the faculty that impose their practices and pedagogical conceptions; rather, it is the established power relations, the ways of understanding hierarchical organizations, and the fragmented perspective of the whole that contribute to the perpetuation of certain school cultures.

Society is composed of individuals shaped and conditioned by hierarchical structures, control, and power. However, this power, exercised over individuals, does not only express a negative connotation (FOUCAULT, 1989), against which, in this case, questioning movements would easily organize in an attempt to transcend its limits. If individuals conform to control relations and integrate into certain structures, sometimes alienated and alienating, it is because the power exercised over

people also leaves positive marks and impressions, which condition their thinking from the earliest years of life.

[...] for if power only served to repress, acting solely through censorship, exclusion, obstruction, and repression [...], if it were exercised only in a negative manner, it would be quite fragile. If it is strong, it is because it produces positive effects at the level of desire - as is beginning to be understood - and also at the level of knowledge. Power, far from hindering knowledge, produces it. [...]. The entrenchment of power and the difficulties faced in breaking free from it stem from all these ties" (FOUCAULT, 1989, pp. 148-149. Emphasis added).

This 'entrenchment of power,' as denounced by Foucault, from which the difficulties to discern and confront it arise within each individual, plays a significant role in the assimilation of new professionals who arrive at the school from time to time, who are easily subjected to the hierarchical prescriptions and rules already in place. Such rules would be fragile were it not for the pre-existing conditioning on each individual to conform, in the original sense of the word, which is to take form this form being something that is not uncomfortable for them; rather, it is familiar and comfortable.

Michael Apple, in an interview with Silva, Marques, and Gandin (2012), also reflects on this and points out the need for analysis regarding curricular policies, schools, and power dynamics: 'I start by thinking about the relationship between school and society in a relational way, that is, it is only possible to discuss the relationship(s) between schools and society if we consider the relationships of subordination and domination that exist in our society' (SILVA; MARQUES; GANDIN, 2012, p. 176).

Such is the minefield of education. These are the ongoing challenges of analyzing educational curricular policies in light of the policy cycle theory. The context of political influence is neither linear nor passive; it does not occur without disputes over power. The context of the construction of the text itself is a game of light and shadows; many voices are present, but some stand out and receive more emphasis than others. The context of practice cannot be seen as the 'implementation' of the earlier analytical spheres of influence and the policy text. In summary, practice is not merely the execution of the policy text; the text is not simply a transcription of the educational conception of those in relevant government positions; influences and conceptions are not singular; they are plural, divergent, and fragmented by territorial disputes.

As can be seen, there is no simple answer to why commemorative dates remain at the center of the curricula and planning in early childhood education schools. The pathways that favor the perpetuation of these curriculum conceptions and pedagogical practices, which are devoid of

meaning, are numerous, forged in different realities, and sustained by diverse circumstances. It is impossible to evaluate what happens in schools in isolation from what occurs in society, from hierarchical and relational dynamics, from the contingencies of each space and each collective, in short, from the entire complexity that surrounds each human 'action.

Some Considerations

In this text, reflections were sought on the prevalence of commemorative dates, which continue to be central to the planning and curricula of early childhood education in many settings, as observed in the researched context. This statement corresponds to a hypothesis tested through a survey conducted with early childhood education teachers in the public network of a city in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. To the question designed to test the hypothesis, in order to verify whether this prevalence is still part of the school routine, 86% (eighty-six percent) responded affirmatively, stating that in their school, the curriculum progressively incorporates the commemorative dates from the calendar, and that these dates generally serve as the basis for themes to be explored with the children.

The bibliographic research conducted also demonstrated that this theme has captured the attention of various researchers over many years. These scholars have denounced, in their work, the impoverished nature of pedagogical practices anchored in commemorative dates. The constrained and decontextualized nature of these curricula originated in a time when early childhood education served a merely assistentialist purpose, when daycares were primarily spaces for caring for children while parents worked, rather than for educating them.

The concern that lingered for these researchers, the same one that sparked this study and article, is to understand which pathways within the trajectories of curricular policies have made the prominent presence of commemorative dates in early childhood education curricula possible. In light of these troubling realities, we sought to draw on Stephen Ball and collaborators' policy cycle theory (1992) to illuminate the attempt to understand all the intertwined phenomena that facilitate the persistent prevalence of such curricular discrepancies.

The epistemological analysis option of the researched reality through the policy cycle approach provided a more comprehensive and qualitative examination of the investigated context. This possibility arises from the broad analytical nature of the different investigation contexts proposed by the theory, which emerge from curricular educational policies: the context of the influence of

policy texts, the context of the actual development of these texts, and the context of professionals' 'actions' in relation to these texts, the context of practice. 'The policy cycle approach has piqued the interest of researchers in the field of Education, particularly those linked to Educational Policy and Curriculum' (MAINARDES, 2018, p. 08).

It is believed that it would be very beneficial if more research of this nature were conducted within practice contexts. The connection between academia and schools produces mutual enrichment that is potent and mobilizing for both sides. When epistemological and academic reflections are carried out with an understanding of the realities experienced by the actors involved in educational processes, the possibilities for real contributions capable of provoking destabilizations and transformations become feasible.

That said, in making some considerations, it is important to emphasize that the decision to test a hypothesis regarding a potentially impoverished and limiting educational scenario present in the early childhood education schools of the researched population is not intended, in any way, to blame the teacher for this situation. On the contrary, the choice of the policy cycle analysis theory is precisely because it underpins and provides a more complex and integral observation of all the aspects involved in educational processes.

Currently, it is true that many discourses circulate that, as interpretations of the country's educational reality, place the teacher in a position of responsibility and blame (SANTOS; BORGES; LOPES; 2019). This is not the interpretation or guiding thread of this research. As noted in the concluding words of this text, it is crucial to emphasize once again that teaching practice, or the teacher themselves, is in no way responsible for undesirable pedagogical contexts. In light of the continuous policy cycle theory, it is possible to perceive how suffocated and besieged a teacher may feel in the face of, and amidst, power struggles, cultural legacies, conditioning subjected to hierarchical structures, prescriptive, alienated, and alienating policies, structural and personnel difficulties in school contexts, and devaluation... These are just a few of the factors and conditions influencing the context of teaching practice.

Still, it is possible to have hope. This research excerpt may leave the reader with pessimistic perspectives regarding the educational landscape. Indeed, one cannot avoid dark perspectives when engaging with the Brazilian educational reality without naivety, from a critical and realistic viewpoint. However, this is not how this article concludes. Nor should an educational ideal of transformation end this way. There are reasons for hope. There are possibilities for resistance. Every

exercise in critical thinking is not fatalistic; it does not close off possibilities. On the contrary, it breaks the established patterns and creates spaces for insurgencies, mobilizations, and transformations in search of new possible realities, as echoed in Freire's classic words: '[...] without denying hopelessness as something concrete and without ignoring the historical, economic, and social reasons that explain it, I cannot understand human existence and the necessary struggle to make it better, without hope and without dreams [...]' (FREIRE; 1992, s.p.).

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