

## New high school and the life project: articulations and meanings in teaching

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to understand the meanings of teaching based on the Life Projects proposed by the NEM, understanding the process of political action and identifying the strategies used by the actors in this policy. The work is qualitative, documentary and bibliographical. We selected research that deals with the NEM and the Life Project, which presents the development of the policy. As a theoretical basis, we present the studies by Ball and Bowe (1992) on the movement of policies in the continuous cycle, and Ball, Maguire and Braun (2016), who address the theory of policy performance. It is possible to understand some of the meanings perceived by teachers through the NEM Life Project. By analyzing the productions, we see gaps that affect this policy, from the dynamics of the teachers' workload to structural needs.

**Keywords:** Life Project. New High School. Acting Theory. Policy Cycle.

### Novo Ensino Médio e o projeto de vida: articulações e sentidos na atuação docente

### Resumo

O presente artigo visa compreender os sentidos da atuação docente a partir dos Projetos de Vida propostos no NEM, entendendo o processo de atuação política e identificando as estratégias utilizadas pelos atores dessa política. O trabalho é de de cunho qualitativo, documental e bibliográfico. Foram selecionadas pesquisas que abordam o NEM e o Projeto de Vida, que apresentam o desenvolvimento da política. Apresentamos como base teórica os estudos de Ball e Bowe (1992) sobre a movimentação das políticas no ciclo contínuo, e Ball, Maguire e Braun (2016), que abordam sobre a teoria da atuação das políticas. É possível entender alguns dos sentidos percebidos pelos docentes por meio do Projeto de Vida do NEM. Ao analisarmos as produções, percebemos lacunas que afetam esta política, desde a dinâmica da carga horária dos professores até as necessidades estruturais.

**Palavras-chave:** Projeto de Vida. Novo Ensino Médio. Teoria da Atuação. Ciclo de Políticas.

## 1 Introduction

With the reform of the New High School in force, we realized that there were some motivations for its implementation in public schools. Initially, in normative terms, with the emergence of Provisional Measure (MP) No. 746, of September 22, 2016, which had as its main objective the diversification of the curriculum and the need to promote, in high schools, dialogue with young people about their contexts, realities and experiences. This happened despite the various demonstrations that took place during this period.

This Provisional Measure was approved and, a few months later, Law No. 13,415, of February 16, 2017, was sanctioned, amending the National Education Guidelines and Base Law (LDB) No. 9,394/1996, at the high school level, establishing the Full-Time High School Policy.

In addition, private companies have emerged as supporters of Brazilian public policies, as a way of establishing the construction of young students' life projects. As a result, a neoliberal ideal appears strongly in this process, since the institutions will be able to take responsibility for some elements of the reform. Thus, education is seen as a means of leading young people to recognize the behaviours and attitudes necessary for the job market.

Another change was in relation to the workload, increasing from 800 hours a year to 1,000 hours a year, in line with the references proposed in the Common National Curriculum Base (BNCC), which should contain elements that indicate curricular flexibility. With this, schools must offer training itineraries, following the four areas of knowledge or an area of Technical and Professional Training. These itineraries are intended to renew Brazilian education, sometimes being understood in a pragmatic sense, as if they could meet the most diverse demands involving young people and school communication. In addition, the New High School brings another compulsory curricular element for schools: the Life Project.

Thus, according to the proposal, the Life Project aims to develop socio-emotional skills, contact and in-depth study of technologies, and perception of the reality that constitutes it. Thus, the proposal of this project is for each young high school student to

build their own Life Project, based on guidance from teachers at the school, advising on possible decision-making and motivating the development of their autonomy, always taking into account the interests of the students.

Faced with so many issues pointed out as the school's responsibility, it is worth considering the various conditions in the school environment (teacher training, structures, resources, among other factors) to adapt the old proposal to the "New". This raises the question: what are the meanings of teaching in the face of the Life Project proposed in the New High School reform?

In this way, as a way of reaching possible understandings based on the question posed above, we present as the objective of the research: to understand the meanings of teacher performance based on the Life Projects proposed in the NEM, understanding the process of political action and identifying the strategies used by the actors in this policy.

## 2 Methodology

In order to achieve the previously proposed objectives and focus on the research, we chose to carry out a qualitative study as a way of understanding, according to Minayo (1994), social reality through what human beings reflect on and produce based on their concepts, motives, beliefs, values and attitudes.

According to Gil (2002), bibliographical and documentary studies, despite having some similarities, are different, especially due to the selection of research sources. For this reason, in documentary research, we aim to understand what the New High School reform proposes, especially the rules that comprise the Life Project. In addition, the classification as bibliographical is obtained by approaching the theoretical framework chosen to support the proposed theme.

However, realizing the variety of possibilities that involve the NEM policy and the notion of the Life Project, it is valid to establish a delimitation in the field of work, since our objective is not to reach the largest region, but to understand the experiences and whether the possible influences in the context of the school environment.

We have therefore organized our work in stages to make it easier to understand. Initially, we sought to present theoretical reflections on the performance of policies according to the studies of Ball, Maguire and Braun (2016). In addition, from a decentralized perspective, we provide an understanding of policy and how it moves through the policy cycle approach.

Next, we aim to investigate the Life Project and the meanings that are being attributed to this expression. In this way, we bring a dissertation and a thesis that deal with the NEM and the Life Project as an element for our reflection on the subject, contributing to the construction of our understanding. These works present the development of the policy, pointing out the strategies used by the players and the difficulties encountered, as well as the possible implications of this process. Finally, we conclude our research with some of our considerations and the results obtained.

## 3 Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Focusing on policies

Educational policy is generally perceived solely as a way of providing and guaranteeing education with better results in evaluations, ensuring the expected performance for the students' education. However, our understanding of policy is based on a decentralized framework. According to Lopes and Macedo (2011), policy can be conceived as an orientation towards practice, highlighting that it allows the results to be understood as solutions to the conflicts inherent in the political process.

In addition, Ball and Bowe (1992) state that curriculum policy should be understood as developed from texts that acquire meanings, adjusting to the situated context. The authors introduce the notion that, among curriculum policies, fragmentation persists in the processes of policy development, showing that policy is often perceived in a linear way that is easy to understand and implement. It is therefore crucial that local contexts are taken into account when drawing up policies, bringing them closer to the needs and reality of the school community. From a decentralized perspective, it is pertinent that the professionals

working in schools also participate in the development of policies, giving meaning to the school reality. However, it is necessary to reflect on the following statement about policy, made by Ball, Maguire and Braun (2016):

They range from safeguarding and CCTV policies to health and safety, community cohesion, uniforms and school trips. Most of them never appear in education policy research, but in different ways they shape, limit and enable the possibilities for teaching and learning, order and organization, social relations and the management of problems and crises (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2016, p. 19).

In this sense, policies cannot be understood solely as those generated in normative texts coming from 'higher' bodies; policies are initiated in different ways and have different paths. Therefore, many of the policies present in schools, responsible for giving order or restricting some notion, can (and usually are) created in the school itself, as Ball points out.

After this brief exposition of what we perceive as policies, it is appropriate to comment that the paths through which policies move, according to our understanding, start from what Stephen Ball and Richard Bowe recognize as the Policy Cycle approach, which will be the focus of the next topic.

### 3.2 The continuous policy cycle approach

The policy cycle is an approach based on authors Stephen Ball and Richard Bowe since the 1980s, which presents a continuous process situated in three main contexts: the context of text production, practice and influence (Mainardes, 2006). Being continuous, the policy cycle must be understood as dynamic and flexible. As such, it does not follow linear or sequential stages; the contexts are in constant interaction.

In this way, this approach makes it possible to understand the process of educational and curricular policies, bearing in mind the complexity that political analysis requires. As Mainardes (2006; 2018) points out regarding the complexity of policy development, especially in relation to an approach that allows for the production of various meanings and that is constantly changing.

With regard to the three contexts mentioned above, we must recognize that they are where reflections on interests, disputes and demands that involve the political process

take place, with the most diverse types of situations. It is therefore crucial to understand the motivation of policies from the contexts of the policy cycle. Therefore, we aim to briefly situate our understanding of the policy cycle, specifically through each context.

The first context we presented does not actually represent the beginning of the cycle, as it is something dynamic. However, it is usually in the context of influence that policies and political discourses are thought up. In this context, discourses of interest are produced and debates about interests and demands related to politics take place. These debates can take place on digital media, such as social networks, political parties and other spheres that allow the dissemination of discourse on politics. As presented by Mainardes (2006), in the context of influence, groups compete to interfere in the goals set by politics. Therefore, we can see the importance of the context of influence, given its relationship with the initiation of political disputes.

As for the context of text production, it is recognized from the policy texts, so it assumes a link with the debates on interests that have common relevance. These can often be seen in normative, official policy texts. In this context, the disputes and interests involved are exposed. According to Mainardes (2006), this context includes textual interventions, but can also represent material impasses and possibilities. Political texts are linked to the agreements and interests of those who will direct the meanings of politics. Furthermore, if we look only at the policy texts, we can perceive disagreement, given that there is a search for dominance and for the meanings of the policies.

When analyzing the context of practice, we see the relationship with the production of meanings by those who interpret the policy. In practice, it is the place where policies are recreated in schools. Thus, policies are modified through the construction of meanings by those who receive them, in this case, the teachers and other professionals who work in schools. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that when policies are implemented, they should not just be a reproduction of what is imposed or proposed, but should seek out the meanings of that policy from the most varied contexts in the community, often producing transformations in the policy.



In addition to the contexts presented, two more secondary contexts emerged: the context of political strategy and the context of results and effects. We will present each context below, but we believe that the established order of presentation is not followed in the development of policies. The context of political strategy focuses on the need to overcome inequalities in policies, while the context of results or effects is linked to actions related to freedom and equality, analyzing the very effects that policies have, as Mainardes (2018) points out.

In this way, we understand the need for teachers and other professionals involved in policy development to participate and seek ways to present their experiences of their contexts in the production of policies, as a way of bringing them closer to social reality. We can see that the policy must be given a new meaning based on contextual needs. This makes it clear that the political process takes place in a complex way, with the interaction of various elements to be perceived.

Therefore, contexts are adapted by policies, and policies are also adjusted to contexts. They must make adjustments in order to deal with the demands that are not met. This is why we agree with Ball when he says that policies are on the move in this continuous cycle. We therefore believe that the policy cycle approach is closely related to action theory, since policies are not simply implemented, but interpreted and translated into different contexts.

### 3.3 Enactment theory and the Life Project

We base this study on the work by Stephen Ball, Meg Maguire and Annette Braun, entitled *How Schools Do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools* (2016), which deals with Enactment Theory. The book is also concerned with understanding how schools deal with demands.

Thus, based on a decentralized analysis, Ball, Maguire and Braun (2016) understand that the process of acting on policies does not occur in a linear way, thus

realizing that policies are arranged more than texts. It is worth noting that the text is a small but important part of the production of policies. As presented by Ball:

[...] Politics is made by and for teachers; they are actors and subjects, subjects and objects of politics. Politics is written on bodies and produces specific subject positions. Politics is complexly encoded in texts and artifacts and is decoded (and recoded) in equally complex ways. To speak of decoding and recoding suggests that the "formulation" of policy is a process of understanding and translation - which of course it is (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2016, p. 13 - 14).

For this reason, it is crucial to investigate how policies are being implemented beyond the normative documents, being able to analyze them as they are interpreted in practice, through processes of interpretation and reinterpretation. According to Ball, Maguire and Braun (2016), policy texts are susceptible to undergoing a process of modification while the policy is in development. Thus, it is said that in schools there are hundreds of policies in motion.

For Ball, in the production of policies there must be a process of interpretation and translation. Briefly, the process of interpretation refers to the understanding of the meanings of the policy, in which the actors will perceive what is necessary for the development of the policy and what should be done. While translation aims to put it into practice, which can be through conversations, meetings and so on. Thus, we understand, according to the author, that "they are different parts of the policy process and have different relationships with practice, [...]. Interpretation is about strategies and translation is about tactics, but they are also sometimes closely intertwined and overlapping" (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2016, p. 72).

With regard to policy actors, we should reflect that they do not have unique and similar characteristics that determine them, nor can they be defined solely as 'implementers' of policies, given that actors have access to and control over the political process. The authors argue that they are not linked to subjects with similar or necessary particularities to a teaching professional or an adult; some individuals may be involved in different roles in their work, taking on other responsibilities and associating the work of the policy through interactions with other subjects.



In this way, it is understood that actors, such as teachers, are also producers of policies. It is therefore essential that teachers' perspectives are taken into account in the policy process, as they have an understanding of how policy is being produced, thus contributing to development in a participatory way.

Ball situates some of the actors as: narrators, entrepreneurs, outsiders, negotiators, enthusiasts, translators, critics and/or receivers. Thus, each actor has their own responsibilities in working with policies. In this way, Ball states that:

Within all this, teachers are positioned differently in relation to politics in a variety of ways. They are at different points in their careers, with varying amounts of accumulated experience. They have different amounts and types of responsibility, aspirations and competencies (Ball, 2016, p. 101).

In addition, we note that the analysis of policies must take into account the construction of the discourse and the contextualization carried out by the institutions that act in the context of practice. In other words, it is necessary to observe how political actors see the official policy texts in the light of the diverse realities that exist in schools, and how they adapt these texts to the context of the school community. In this way, the subjects involved in the production of policy should not be considered passive, since they are capable of recreating and interacting with policies in different ways.

It is therefore possible to note that research into policy texts cannot be considered an easy task. Thus, "our argument is that the performance of policy is not a simple and rational process - although it is sometimes made to appear so - and the results are not easy to read outside the origins of policy (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2016, p.197). The analysis therefore involves disputes over interests, ideologies and conceptualizations that cannot be fixed and are therefore susceptible to influence.

Based on Law No. 13,415/2017, the term Life Project is defined as follows: "ART. 3 § 7 High school curricula should consider the integral formation of the student, in order to adopt work aimed at the construction of their life project and their formation in the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional aspects" (Brazil, 2017). In line with this proposal, the life project must integrate the personal, social and professional dimensions of young

people, and these dimensions are seen as fundamental elements for building and planning their future.

In a nutshell, the personal dimension is related to self-knowledge, allowing students to identify their abilities, interests and aspirations. In this dimension, it is essential that they understand their values and ways of coping with life events. The social dimension, meanwhile, involves interactions with other people and understanding one's role in society, presenting ways of resolving everyday conflicts collectively or individually. The third dimension, the professional dimension, seeks to ensure that students understand and meet the demands of the world of work, adapting to the necessary professional criteria.

These three dimensions raise important questions for development in schools. Considering different realities, there will be students who do not wish to enter the job market. In this context, how can the school define the necessary characteristics for these individuals? This leads to reflection on the preparation of teachers to deal with the issues raised by the social and personal dimensions. In addition, the Life Project outlined in the New High School (NMS) does not have a defined workload, and can either be part of the part stipulated in the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) with specific teachers from the areas of knowledge, or be included in the workload allocated to formative itineraries. It is therefore necessary to plan how the Life Project can be contemplated in institutions, given the emergence of various demands for teaching. As Costa and Lopes (2018, p. 316) point out:

The project of a fully aware, creative, sociable citizen for the world of work needs to be carried out in a curriculum matrix that integrates disciplinary knowledge, so that from this perspective it is possible to achieve it at school, and from there to life: a contextualization capable of preparing the subject for all-knowing-doing in the most different contexts they will come to deal with.

Thus, we can see that the role of secondary schools is linked to the way in which young people recognize their potential and experience diverse situations that provide opportunities for development in aspects of the present and the future. It must therefore take into account the diverse realities of the students with the aim of fully forming them as critical and creative individuals.

As a way of getting closer to the notions developed in relation to the Life Project and the New High School, we selected a master's dissertation and a doctoral thesis in order to recognize the paths taken and the reflections produced. The selection criteria for these two studies was based on searches carried out in the Brazilian Digital Library of Thesis and Dissertations (BDTD). When searching for studies related to the Life Project and the New High School, we identified these studies as an important element in building the understanding of high school teachers.

In this way, we selected the dissertation by Queiroz (2021), from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), entitled "The emergence of the life project in full-time secondary education in Rio Grande do Norte" and the thesis by Corrêa (2023), from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), entitled "Performance of the 'New Secondary Education' in the state educational context of Rio Grande do Sul: the curriculum in the contexts of text production and practice".

Although one of the titles does not explicitly mention the term Life Project, we noticed that throughout the research this is an element that is constantly addressed by the authors. In addition, both studies take Stephen Ball, Meg Maguire and Annette Braun's Acting Theory as their theoretical framework, as well as the Continuous Policy Cycle approach.

In relation to the search to determine the conceptualization of the Life Project, we agree with Queiroz's (2021) statement that

[...] we can understand the impossibility of fixing an ultimate or fixed meaning about the meaning of the Life Project, even if it is possible to share some conceptualization, even if provisional, of what is meant by Life Project. The term takes on different contexts and demands that make it possible to produce meanings in view of the subjects' subjectivity (p. 81 and 82).

In this way, because it is associated with a project that requires an understanding of so many different realities, the conceptualization of a Life Project to be followed becomes an unachievable mission, given the multiple contexts that are sometimes close, sometimes opposite, but which, in fact, cannot be the same for the students. Therefore, we can't pin down a single meaning for the Life Project.

According to the analysis carried out by Queiroz (2021), teachers' understanding of the Life Project is related to the orientation of teachers/tutors with young people, as a way of stimulating and indicating the possibilities and paths that can be taken. The author points out that these meanings deconstruct the idea of student protagonism, as defended by the NEM.

In view of this, Queiroz (2021) states that

This relationship is implicated in a process of negotiation and power relations that permeate the school and the teachers in relation to the policy. Teacher performance is a recurring process of signification with the policy and negotiation of the processes of "putting into practice" the interpretations and translations of the policy in the context of practice (p. 108).

We can see from Corrêa's research in the schools that the selection of teachers to offer Life Projects was based on the need of teachers who had been left with a reduced workload. In addition, the institution took care to select a specific profile for each proposal. The person responsible for the project was a teacher and student in the field of psychology. In this way, the teacher saw the possibility of being able to address socio-emotional skills in particular, producing meanings for the policy. We can understand this notion from what the author says:

It is interesting to note that the Life Project as a policy, and as a curricular component, has a symbolic effect on this teacher's practice, producing a teaching subjectivity that goes beyond her pedagogical training, without annulling this knowledge, but reaches the field of Psychology as the driving force behind her teaching work (Corrêa, 2023, p. 188).

Therefore, as Ball, Maguire and Braun (2016) point out, the process of political action is dynamic, moving in different ways based on the interpretations and translations of the actors involved in politics, recognizing the contexts. In addition, the author points out the response to politics made by students, through the demands of young people, with the development of necessary projects, recognized as artifacts of politics (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2016).

Therefore, Corrêa (2016, p.192-193) points out that "the processes of interpretation and translation of the policy take place in a dynamic and dialectical way, so while the Life

Project proposal is translated into its practices, through the process of shaping the curriculum, interpretations of the policy still circulate in this context". In this way, we consider it essential for there to be dialogue and understanding between schools, young students and communities as a way of understanding the contextual reality, needs, interests and ways of developing the proposal, considering the limits to its realization in schools.

We therefore understand that the Life Project is a policy within the context of the New High School. This policy not only limits and determines actions, but also allows for the production of meanings by the actors involved, specifically the teachers and other professionals in the educational institutions. These professionals are responsible for interpreting and translating the guidelines proposed in the educational policy. Furthermore, it is essential that curricula reflect the contextual realities in which schools are located, guaranteeing an educational approach that is contextualized and relevant to students.

## 4 Conclusions

In this way, based on the analysis carried out in this research, it was possible to understand some of the meanings perceived by teachers through the NEM Life Project. We understand the various changes made to the structure of Brazilian secondary education, such as the notion of curricular flexibility and student protagonism proposed in the reform. We also investigated, through our theoretical framework, how complex and dynamic the process of political action is. We noticed that policies are not implemented in a single way, but rather go through a process of interpretation and translation by the actors involved, who perceive the strategies necessary for their production in certain contexts. In addition, we can understand the movement that policies make through the policy cycle.

We can also see gaps that affect this policy, from the dynamics of teachers' workloads to structural needs. However, we can see how these issues are being reflected on from the experiences pointed out by the authors. Thus, the Life Project must be a

production that accompanies the progress of young people in their cultural, social and other contexts.

In this way, we believe that educational institutions play a fundamental role in reflecting on and reinterpreting educational policies aimed at schools. Therefore, it is important that this role is recognized so that the proposed guidelines can go beyond mere implementation, becoming recognized and generating meaning in the various existing contexts.

Finally, we believe it is important to continue researching the Life Project and the New High School, since it is a stage of education that has a major influence on the formation of young people as critical citizens and participants in society. It seeks to ensure that young people can be the protagonists of their lives and define their own paths. We therefore see the need to expand research in this area in different Brazilian regions, as a way of understanding the influences and demands of each context.

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