

**CONTEXTS AND TRAJECTORIES FOR THE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC POLICIES:  
THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION**

**CONTEXTOS E TRAJETÓRIAS PARA A ANÁLISE DE POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS:  
APORTES TEÓRICOS PARA O CAMPO DA EDUCAÇÃO<sup>1</sup>**

**CONTEXTOS Y TRAYECTORIAS PARA EL ANÁLISIS DE LAS POLÍTICAS  
PÚBLICAS: APORTES TEÓRICOS AL CAMPO DE LA EDUCACIÓN**

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents an analysis model of contexts to understand the trajectory of implementation of public policies, providing theoretical and methodological contributions to the education field. It starts with the need to overcome traditional perspectives that reduce policies to oversimplified systems, such as the classic cycle. It considers the political dimensions of implementation, presenting the concept of trajectory and proposing five related contexts: (1) contexts of the conjunctures; (2) contexts of policy contents; (3) institutional contexts; (4) contexts of experiences; and (5) territory contexts. The contexts allow to understand the trajectories through a transversal, fluid, and dynamic chain of decision-making processes, which triggers and mobilizes different actors, processes, knowledge, and practices, crossing them. Our results suggest a model that considers the tensions, contradictions, challenges, and inflections linked to the life of policies, so that the analyzes are more dense and contextualized.

**KEYWORDS:** Contexts. Trajectories. Implementation. Public policy. Educational policies.

**RESUMO:** O artigo apresenta um modelo de análise de contextos para se compreender as trajetórias de implementação de políticas públicas, fornecendo aportes teóricos e metodológicos para o campo da educação. Parte da necessidade de superação das perspectivas tradicionais que reduzem as políticas a sistemas simplificados e, para tal, considera as dimensões políticas da implementação, apresentando a noção de trajetória. Propõe cinco

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*contextos, entrelaçados: (1) contexto das conjunturas; (2) contexto dos conteúdos da política; (3) contextos institucionais; (4) contexto das experiências; e (5) contexto dos territórios. Os contextos permitem compreender trajetórias por meio de uma cadeia transversal, fluida e dinâmica de processos de tomada de decisão, que mobiliza diversos atores, processos, saberes e práticas. Nossos resultados sugerem um modelo que considera as tensões, as contradições, os desafios, e as inflexões vinculadas à vida das políticas, de modo que as análises sejam mais densas e contextualizadas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Contextos. Trajetórias. Implementação. Políticas públicas. Políticas educacionais.*

**RESUMEN:** *El artículo presenta un modelo de análisis de contextos para comprender la trayectoria de implementación de políticas públicas, con aportes teóricos y metodológicos al campo de la educación. Parte de la necesidad de superar las perspectivas tradicionales que reducen las políticas a sistemas simplificados, como el ciclo clásico, y considera las dimensiones políticas de la implementación, presentando la noción de trayectoria. Enumera cinco contextos entrelazados: (1) contexto de la coyuntura; (2) contexto del contenido de la política; (3) contexto institucional; (4) contexto de la experiencia; y (5) contexto territorial. Los contextos permiten comprender las trayectorias a través de una cadena transversal, fluida y dinámica de procesos de toma de decisiones, que moviliza diferentes actores, procesos, saberes y prácticas. Nuestros resultados sugieren un modelo que considera las tensiones, contradicciones, desafíos e inflexiones vinculadas a la vida de las políticas, de modo que los análisis sean más densos y contextualizados.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Contextos. Trayectorias. Implementación. Políticas públicas. Políticas educativas.*

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to propose a model of context analysis to understand the trajectories of implementation of public policies, deepening and articulating theoretical and methodological contributions that dialogue with the field of educational policies and programs. Several authors use a variety of definitions for public policies. Souza (2006, p. 24) cites some of them, from a referential based on the State: "set of government actions that will produce specific effects", from Lynn<sup>5</sup> (1980 apud SOUZA, 2006, p. 24); "what the government chooses to do or not do," by Dye (1984); or Laswell's definition <sup>6</sup> (1958 apud SOUZA, 2006 p. 24), which states that the study of public policy seeks to answer "who gets what, why, and what

<sup>5</sup> LYNN, L. E. **Designing Public Policy:** A Casebook on the Role of Policy Analysis. Santa Monica: Goodyear, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> LASWELL, H. D. **Politics:** Who Gets What, When, How. Cleveland, Meridian Books. 1936/1958.

difference it makes. In the same direction, Hofling (2001, p. 31) resumes a classic definition by stating that policies are the "State in action".

Authors linked to the perspective of public action, on the other hand, understand public policies from other analytical possibilities, where the State is not the central or most relevant actor, since policies are not necessarily born from state action, but through the actions of the various actors that occupy the public arena. Halpern, Lascoumes, and Le Galés (2021) analyze them through the instruments or devices that make up the social relations, with emphasis on the interactions, conflicts, and disputes that the public arena reveals. Benamouzig and Borraz (2021), in turn, do so through the understanding of the strategies adopted by organizations that act in the public sphere and how they are able to mobilize agendas and interests.

Such conceptions indicate that the analysis of public policies encompasses several associated aspects: the actors involved, their connections and interests; the formulation and execution process; the definition of agendas; the implementation dynamics; the proposed objectives and the achieved results. Thus, a multidisciplinary field is formed, involving sociology, political science, public administration, economics, in addition to specific fields such as education, health, and security.

Oliveira (2019) claims that there is still the predominance of an institutionalist conception focused on hierarchy and "official" policy objectives, which overvalues the policy formulation stage and assumes, linearly, that such objectives will be achieved if the required inputs are made available. This perspective idealizes the interactions between implementing actors from a Weberian perspective - which comprises an objective and non-political performance of bureaucrats - and believes in the predictability of processes, ensuring that implementation will deliver the expected results.

It is in this context that the notion of trajectory emerges, as an important analytical perspective for the analysis of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation, opposing, therefore, the linear idea of the classic policy cycle, widespread in the literature<sup>7</sup>. Based on the formulation of Gussi and Oliveira (2016) and Oliveira (2019), we assume that analyzing a public policy implies understanding its itinerary, that is, analyzing its effects, its results, its impacts, and the issues associated with the design and its implementation, transversely. Therefore, perspectives that consider the complexity of public policy trajectories become necessary.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Souza (2006), the public policy cycle can be described in four stages or moments: (1) agenda creation; (2) policy formulation; (3) implementation; and (4) evaluation.

Based on Oliveira (2019) and Oliveira and Peixoto (2021), we understand that the implementation process reveals the political dimension that permeates the entire trajectory of a public policy, marked by considerable complexity and dynamism. This perspective recognizes the decision-making capacity of the actors that act along the implementation chain, marked by interactions, interpretations, decisions, and tensions that open room for countless possibilities for policy implementation - an unpredictable process, especially when the territories, where policies take place, are taken into consideration.

Also in this direction, Lejano (2012) proposes contextualized and complex analyses of public policies. The author states that the different hegemonic models developed over time have generally sought to reduce policies to oversimplified systems of analysis. These models, as well as the classic cycle of public policies, start from a linear logic, focused on measuring the object of study, preventing the understanding of the policy as it actually occurs and is lived, experienced by a multiplicity of actors.

Rodrigues (2008, 2016) presents a proposal for policy evaluation that also takes into account the contexts, be they social, economic, political and cultural, either through institutional analysis, power relations, interests and values that permeate the processes of policy formulation and implementation. Although the discussion proposed by the author is inserted in the field of policy evaluation, her considerations are relevant to analyze the contexts related to the processes of formulation and implementation.

In the field of education, we highlight the contributions of Stephen Ball and other authors dedicated to analyzing the connections between contexts from another reading of the policy cycle (BALL; BOWE; GOLD, 1992; BALL, 1994; BALL; MAGUIRE; BRAUN, 2016). By critiquing the classic cycle applied to the field of education, the authors provide a set of theoretical and methodological references that allow the analyst to investigate educational programs and policies from their initial formulation to their evaluation, passing through the implementation stage, where, according to these authors, the policy is acted upon.

In this article, we start, therefore, from some assumptions: the first is related to the fact that the analysis should not ignore the articulation between formulation and implementation, at the risk of neglecting important dimensions of the policy universe. It is important that analysts describe, in a contextualized way, the complex pathways of public policies. It becomes necessary, therefore, to understand the movements produced by policies, the ways in which they are interpreted and contextualized, the interactions between actors and institutions, among other dimensions that can be unveiled along their trajectory, before the moment of formulation.

Moreover, it is considered that the texts that describe and regulate policies are not put into practice linearly and objectively, as their contexts are diverse and produce changes in policies. Until the policies are actually implemented and materialized in public services in the territories and in everyday life, there is a long chain of decision-making processes, which extend through different levels and can modify their intentions and results. Therefore, texts are not static documents and contexts, consequently, are decisive to understand these dynamics.

Finally, policy movements must be considered from formulation through implementation and evaluation. Furthermore, it is important to consider them not as an orderly and continuous flow of phases, but as moments that intertwine and are mediated by specific contexts, also intertwined.

Thus, based on the contributions of these authors, this article presents a model that articulates these references and advances this discussion in order to provide new theoretical contributions that guide the analysis of policies based on their contexts and their implementation trajectories, including educational policies and programs. To this end, we present five contexts of analysis, which must be understood in an intertwined way: (1) context of the conjunctures; (2) context of the policy contents; (3) institutional contexts; (4) context of the experiences; and (5) context of the territories.

Besides the introduction and the final considerations, the article is organized in three sections. In the first, we start from the classic discussions about the public policy cycle and its connections with implementation. In the second, we intend these connections, broadening the spectrum of analysis based on the contributions of the authors referenced in this introduction. The third section presents the proposed framework, based on the five contexts of analysis.

### **The implementation process and the classic public policy cycle**

According to Souza (2006), there are several models in the literature to analyze public policies. One of these models is the classic cycle, which starts from the idea that the policy goes through linear, interconnected, and interdependent phases: agenda setting; elaboration or formulation of policies and programs; implementation; and evaluation. According to Oliveira (2019), agenda setting comprises the moment when themes or issues become relevant and are addressed by governments and the state. It would therefore be up to the analyst to understand the reasons why such issues became relevant to the agenda.

For Lotta (2019), policy formulation comprises the definitions, elaborations, and planning regarding the formats and objectives to be adopted in policies. The role of actors and coalitions in the process would be the points of analysis.

According to Oliveira (2019), implementation concerns the ways in which policies are executed. Oliveira and Peixoto (2019) clarify that implementation should be understood as a dynamic process, in which there are interactions between the implementing agents - the bureaucrats, at the various levels in which they act - with the policy recipients. In these interactions there are conflicts, tensions, disputes, and negotiations among the actors involved in this process.

Finally, evaluation, according to Lotta (2019), constitutes the measurement of policy outcomes. In the view of Rosa, Lima, and Aguiar (2021), evaluation is a phase of questioning about policy processes: were the objectives met? Were the target groups reached? Was the desired social change achieved? Therefore, it is a stage of information production about the policy, which can feed back into the entire cycle.

The implementation phase, specifically, can be considered as one of the most important because, according to Lotta (2019), it corresponds to the moment when the formulated plans are put into practice by the action of different actors. In this same line of reasoning, Louzano, Freitas, Santos, Ribeiro, and Gusmão (2018) state that, in relation to this stage, analysts seek to understand what happens to the ideas and goals that will be realized.

Lotta (2019) states that studies on implementation emerged after great development of the field of public policy evaluation studies. The knowledge from this field, allowed the recognition of the differences between policy outcomes and their initial objectives. With this, the questions about the reasons for these differences promoted the studies about the processes that put the policies into practice.

Syntheses that present the development of this field based on different generations of studies are recurrent in the literature, such as in Matland (1995), Lotta (2019), and Bichir (2020). Among the generations of implementation studies, the dichotomy present in the first two stands out: top-down and bottom-up. The first generation of studies, called top down, in the 1970s, assumed that public policies, when put into practice, from the top down, would generate the previously planned results. With a strong normative concern and, understanding that the decision-making process should take place, exclusively, by elected representatives, such generation assumed that it would be up to bureaucrats to simply execute the policies. According to Lotta (2019), for these studies, if non-elected bureaucratic actors made decisions

during implementation that altered previously designed goals or tasks, this would constitute subversion or perversion. Thus, these studies sought to find the errors in the implementation process in order to correct them.

Bichir (2020) states that the main criticism to these studies was related to the fact that they ignored the conflicts, complexity, and ambiguity that may be present in implementation. Matland (1995), in turn, highlights that the centrality given by the top-down view to policy makers and to a supposedly strictly operational implementation were the focus of criticism. In short, such criticism was based on the invisibilization of the decision-making capacity of bureaucrats in the political dimension present in both formulation and implementation.

In counterpoint to the first, the second generation of studies, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, is called bottom-up. According to Bichir (2020), these studies focused on local implementation processes in the context of policy delivery. Therefore, the analysis made by this approach looked at the implementation from the bottom up, having as main reference what actually happens at the moment of implementation.

It is in this generation that studies on street-level bureaucracies were developed, a concept formulated by Lipsky (1980). According to this author, these bureaucrats experience daily life with the user population, the difficulties of the local work process, besides mediating between citizens and the State, making it possible to expand the citizenship dimension and the critical role towards the user subjects.

Oliveira (2019) points out the relevance of Lipsky's studies (1980) and of several researchers who advanced in this direction for the analysis of implementation in local contexts, since, from these studies, research began to focus, at the micro level, on how decisions are made; the practices adopted; the processing of rules and norms; the interactions with citizens; the attitudes of grassroots agents, their behavior patterns, and on how they interpret and translate policies according to the routine, the norms, and the daily work they perform.

It is possible to identify in the first two generations a dichotomy between the focuses of analysis. If, on the one hand, top-down studies focused on the legitimacy of policymakers' decisions, bottom-up approaches prioritized what happened at the grassroots. Although other analytical perspectives were later developed to overcome this duality, this dichotomy remained present in the analyses.

As of the 1990s, several authors proposed to seek to overcome this duality, elaborating other analytical and theoretical models. As examples, we can cite the models developed by Matland (1995) and Sabatier (2007). Matland (1995) proposed the analysis of implementation

based on the relationship between the dimensions ambiguity and conflict, considering these elements as determinants in the development of its processes. According to Lotta, Bauer, Jobim, and Merchán (2021), ambiguity refers to the space given by the policy for interpretation and adaptation with respect to both means and ends. Conflict is related to the interdependence between actors and the (in)compatibility of objectives.

Sabatier (2007), in turn, aims to understand decision-making processes from and within coalitions, composed of actors who share policy beliefs within a policy subsystem. Thus, changes stem from competition and learning within subsystems. Lotta (2019) states that both Matland's (1995) and Sabatier's (2007) models analyze the decision-making processes embedded in public policy, being an attempt to move away from the contraposition between formulation and implementation. Particularly, for Sabatier (2007), the need to simplify and organize the complexity of the processes is confronted with the challenge of not silencing and secondaryizing dimensions that are also relevant.

This challenge is expressed in the different theoretical currents of implementation studies that, by focusing on certain aspects of the processes, end up invisibilizing others. The discussions of Matland (1995), Sabatier (2007), Lotta (2019) and Oliveira (2019) demonstrate, therefore, a need for the overcoming of these nuances, as well as the search for new analytical models.

The discussions undertaken regarding public policy analyses with a focus on implementation processes bring challenges to the field at hand and inform that such generations are not mutually exclusive, as both provide important evidence about the life of policies. Assuming that the cycle, by isolating the phases of formulation, implementation, and evaluation, reinforces a naive, unrealistic, and deterministic view about policies, relegating them to managerial and administrative decisions, how to converge and broaden the approaches so that policies are perceived in an organic, systemic, transversal, and integrated way? This is the object of the next section.

### **Other approaches to the analysis of public policy implementation**

Gussi and Oliveira (2016) emphasize that public policy has trajectories and, therefore, does not have only one single meaning, as it can be re-signified according to its unfoldings in the institutions or territories where they land. In this direction, Oliveira (2019) states that policies are a process of successive meanings attributed to them; they are a succession of advances and ruptures that give movement to their process.



In this sense, the concept of trajectory, transposed by Oliveira (2019) and Oliveira and Gussi (2016) to the field of educational policies, provides an important analytical perspective for the analysis of the different processes, movements, and meanings that compose them, opposing the linear perspective of the policy cycle. It is established, therefore, the need to understand such movements, or itineraries of public policies, considering the different and complex dimensions that constitute them, circumscribing its effects, its results, its impacts and dimensions associated with the design and its implementation.

Lejano (2012) states that the different hegemonic models developed over time (from classical to post-positivist) have sought to reduce policies to closed and simplified systems of analysis. The risk of pre-establishing closed models of analysis, according to the author, consists in the inability to unveil new dimensions and elements of policy processes. Thus, analyses based on such models run the risk of simply confirming simplified and previously defined dimensions. The problem, according to Lejano (2012), is the danger of the analyses distancing themselves from reality, hiding dense and complex dimensions that permeate the contexts in which policies are developed - what the author calls, metaphorically, "the mythification of policies".

Such distancing from reality, or "mythification," already appears in the policy formulation processes, since, as a rule, the formulators are distant from the populations affected by them. Thus, this problem is found even before the gaps present in the different models of analysis, constituting what Lejano (2012) calls the distance between project and political action. In other words, by mythifying or oversimplifying, one runs the risk of proposing, formulating and/or analyzing policies while ignoring the complexity of the real world, preventing the understanding of politics as it actually occurs and is lived, experienced by a multiplicity of actors.

Thus, for the author, since policies are put into practice in the most diverse contexts and, consequently, produce different results, an understanding of these contexts becomes necessary. Consequently, Lejano (2012), affirms the need to overcome the gap between the text and the context present in policy analysis. Based on these findings, the author proposes an analysis model based on contextuality, experience, and complexity. Thus, the analysis proposal developed by the author is based on the hermeneutic paradigm, with a focus on interpretation. In seeking to understand the meanings of a policy for those who experience it, the author then proposes two dimensions of analysis: (1) experience and (2) coherence or institutional fit.

On the first dimension, the author states that the contexts in which policies are put into practice can only be understood by those who have experienced them. Experiences, according to Lejano (2012), are the knowledge of those who are embedded in the scenarios and conjunctures that shape policies. Considering the experience of those involved in the policies, their knowledge, feelings (multidimensional and subjective elements), researchers can elevate their analysis to more complex levels, as are the experiences. Aiming at dense descriptions that respect the complexity of the policies, the author proposes analyses through methods that favor the actors who experience them to list the different dimensions of their experiences.

The second dimension proposed by Lejano (2012), describes how a policy is embedded in a given context. The author assumes that "a new policy does not just land in a situation; instead, the policy must find connections with existing patterns of governance, social structures, and the community itself" (LEJANO, 2012, p. 227). By considering that institutional and organizational contexts affect policies and are therefore contingent upon them, Lejano (2012), asserts that policies are not simply put into practice in an objective and linear manner.

For the author, actual institutions are not just rules and organizational structures; they are arenas interwoven with their culture, with histories, personalities, and other context contingencies. When policies come into contact with institutions and the subjects that coexist in them, they are assigned connections to the realities and cultures that exist in these spaces. Thus, a policy needs to fit with the contexts through which it navigates.

Thus, the notion of coherence assumes that policies, texts, and institutions fit the contexts, and the engagement of the text with the real induces real changes in the way the policy is put into action. Thus, since diversity is to be expected in the way policies manifest themselves in different institutions, the work of analysis must seek to understand such contexts. In this way, Lejano (2012), proposes analyses that, through the experience of actors who live the policies, seek to understand how policies develop in the face of the complex contexts through which they navigate.

In-depth evaluation, proposed by Rodrigues (2008, 2016), is also guided by the hermeneutic paradigm (interpretive approach) that underlies Lejano's (2012) proposal. According to the author, it is not possible to reach an exact result about a policy since different meanings can be attributed to it by those who experience it. The author then proposes four axes of policy analysis: (1) program/policy content; (2) policy formulation context; (3) institutional trajectories of a program/policy; and (4) temporal and territorial spectrum, detailed in Chart 1:

**Chart 1 – Axes of analysis of the in-depth evaluation**

<b>Axes of analysis</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Program/policy content</b>	Analysis of objectives, criteria, implementation dynamics, monitoring and evaluation. It also analyzes the conceptual bases (guiding paradigms and the conceptions and values that inform them), as well as the central concepts and notions that sustain the policy/program.
<b>Policy formulation context</b>	Analysis of the political moment and socioeconomic conditions in which the program/policy was formulated and ended, as well as apprehension of the political, economic, and social model that supported the policy at the time of its formulation.
<b>Institutional paths of a program/policy</b>	Analysis of the degree of coherence/dispersion of the program/policy throughout its transit through institutional channels, at the different organizational and hierarchical levels and layers. According to Rodrigues (2008), when a policy/program is formulated in the federal sphere, in order to be evaluated, it is important to reconstitute its trajectory, that is, the changes in the meanings given to the program's objectives and its dynamics, as it passes through differentiated spaces and, at the same time, goes down the institutional hierarchies until it reaches the base.
<b>Temporal and territorial spectrum</b>	Apprehension of the temporal and territorial configuration of the course of the program/policy in order to confront the general proposals/objectives of the policy with the local specificities and their historicity.

Source: Rodrigues (2008, 2016)

In the educational field, the Policy Cycle Approach formulated by Stephen Ball and other authors (BALL; BOWE; GOLD, 1992; BALL, 1994) stands out. These authors reject the models that separate the formulation and implementation phases and propose five contexts of analysis: (1) context of influence; (2) context of text production; (3) context of practice; (4) context of outcomes or effects and (5) context of policy strategy. These contexts are interrelated and there is no sequential or linear dimension between them, since each one of them presents arenas, places and interest groups, and there are also disputes and clashes (BALL; BOWE; GOLD, 1992 apud MAINARDES, 2006).

The context of influence is where educational policies are usually initiated and political discourses are constructed with the presence of interest groups, relationship networks established within and around political parties, the government, and the legislative process. The context of text production is related to the policy text itself, which needs to be read in relation to the specific time and place of its production. In relation to the context of practice, it is where the policy is subject to interpretation and recreation, producing effects and consequences that may represent significant changes and transformations in the original policy. According to Oliveira (2019), the subjects that act at the local level, in the context of practice, are not simply executors of the policies; they assume an active role by the fact that they alter, adapt, interpret, and translate the policy from their beliefs, values, perceptions, attitudes that, in a certain way, reflect in the decisions to be made by these subjects.

The context of outcomes or effects deals with the effects of the policy in relation to issues of justice, equality, individual freedom, and the realization of rights. In this context,

"policies should be analyzed in terms of their impact and interactions with existing inequalities" (BALL; BOWE; GOLD, 1992 apud MAINARDES, 2006, p. 54). Finally, the policy strategy context concerns the identification and analysis of a set of social and political activities that would be necessary to deal more effectively with the social inequalities created or reproduced by the investigated educational policy/programme.

Advancing this perspective, Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016) formulated performance theory by asserting that education policies are not merely implemented, but are subject to processes of recontextualization and re-creation, in the context of practice. Performance theory is geared towards understanding how complex contexts with a diversity of actors interact, creatively, in processes of interpretation, translation, and contextualization of education policies. According to them, contexts actively act on policy outcomes and, therefore, even similar contexts affect differently the materialization of policies according to their peculiarities. One of the ways in which contexts actively act in the materialization of policies concerns the way in which they are interpreted and translated at the local level, that is, in schools.

For Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016), interpretation is a political process that involves the initial reading and the attribution of meanings to the policy. These interpretations are developed based on how the policies fit into the reality of the school institution. Interpretations, in this way, dialogue with the contexts and possibilities of the institution, and culminate in the creation of an institutional narrative vis-à-vis the policies. Translation, according to the authors, is a more practical process, marked by the elaboration of texts, materials, and institutional spaces that will put the policy into practice. Both processes are closely related and involve considerable doses of creativity and subjectivity.

The authors, when discussing how contexts, very specific in each school institution, act in an active and relevant way in the way policies are put into practice, proposed four contextual dimensions: (1) situated contexts; (2) professional cultures; (3) material contexts; and (4) external contexts, detailed in Chart 2:

**Chart 2 – Contextual dimensions of performance theory**

<b>Contextual dimensions</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Situated Contexts</b>	Historical and local dimensions of the school: aspects of its neighborhood, characteristics of its audience, and demand for enrollment. These factors influence, for example, the demands of students and their relationship with teachers.
<b>Professional Cultures</b>	Teachers' values and experiences. Their training, tenure, departmental and collaborative relationships affect how educational policies are read and interpreted.
<b>Material Contexts</b>	Budgets, infrastructure, and staff.
<b>External Contexts</b>	Dimensions external to the school institution, such as pressures and expectations, positions in league tables and legal requirements, or political conjunctures.

Source: Ball, Maguire e Braun (2016)

According to Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016), these contextual dimensions serve as an analytical device to be considered in field research that seeks to understand the circumstances that influence everyday performance in schools. Based on these formulations, we understand that they can be extended to other spaces, approaches, and hierarchical and organizational levels of implementation, going beyond the level of territories.

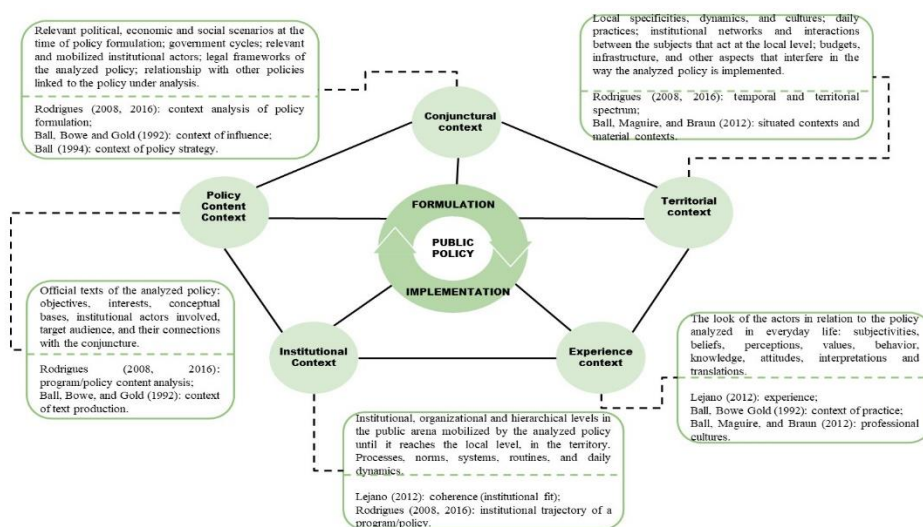
### **Contexts and trajectories in the policy implementation process**

The discussions proposed by Lejano (2012), Rodrigues (2008, 2016), Ball, Bowe and Gold (1992), Ball (1994), Ball, Maguire and Braun (2016), dialogue directly with the concept of trajectory proposed by Gussi and Oliveira (2016) and Oliveira (2019). For Oliveira (2019) and Oliveira and Peixoto (2021), as they navigate, policies are resignified and produce meanings amid processes of advances and ruptures. Such a concept allows retracing the important steps of a policy - the discourses, the arguments, the legislative and regulatory dimensions, its transformations, inflections, and evolutions. Moreover, the trajectory reveals contextual dimensions both in relation to the conceptions, contexts and ideologies of the official texts, as well as the shifts, resources and contexts when the policies are put into practice. Therefore, the concept of trajectory is configured as an important analytical, epistemological and methodological perspective for the analysis of contexts that permeate and influence the course of public policies.

Thus, based on the discussions undertaken by these authors regarding the analysis of public policies, articulated with the concept of trajectory, we propose an analysis model that aims to provide new theoretical contributions to guide the analysis of policies based on their contexts and their implementation trajectories. Based on this proposal, we provide theoretical

and methodological contributions that dialogue with the field and the analysis of educational programs, broadening its understanding. Altogether, five interconnected contexts of analysis are proposed: (1) context of contexts; (2) context of policy contents; (3) institutional contexts; (4) context of experiences; and (5) context of territories. Figure 1 presents the dimensions of analysis for each context and how they should be understood, in an intertwined and transversal manner:

**Figure 1 – Contexts associated with policy trajectories**

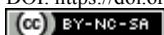


Source: Prepared by the authors

### Context of the conjunctures

The context of the conjuncture encompasses the agendas, their definitions and the processes associated with policy formulation from the political, economic and social scenarios, the legal frameworks that support it and the survey of other policies related to the analyzed policy. In line with what Ball, Bowe and Gold (1992) and Ball (1994) propose, by analyzing the conjuncture it will be possible to analyze how public policies are initiated, as well as the disputes of groups in relation to their purposes and interests.

Rodrigues (2008, 2016) states that by analyzing the context of a policy formulation, it is possible to raise data about the political moment and the socioeconomic conditions, in addition to the survey of other correlated policies. By analyzing the context, it is possible to apprehend the historicity of the investigated policy, i.e., a set of aspects and factors that concern its architecture, its design and its identity.



## **Policy Content Context**

The policy content context is linked to the analysis of the official texts that institute the policy. These documents can be official legal texts, formal or informal comments on official texts, pronouncements, videos and other sources that provide elements that allow the analyst to understand the policy from a normative and regulatory perspective (BALL; BOWE; GOLD, 1992 apud MAINARDES, 2006).

In accordance with what Rodrigues (2008, 2016) proposes, it consists of the analysis of objectives and conceptual bases present in official texts. According to the author, it is important for the researcher, starting from the text, to develop a content analysis of the "ideas, notions and values" that guide and ground it. Once this is done, the analyst should also systematize the processes and rules that govern the policy, in order to visualize its implementation from the texts.

Ball, Bowe and Gold (1992 apud MAINARDES, 2006), in turn, state that the political texts represent the policy and, therefore, need to be read in a critical way, because they are not necessarily coherent and clear, and may be contradictory. In this way, political texts are the result of disputes and agreements, as groups operating within the different sites of text production compete to control the representations of politics.

It is assumed that the analysis of the contents of politics, besides favoring the practical understanding proposed, allows the unveiling of dimensions that dialogue with other contexts to be analyzed. The understanding of the conceptual bases and ideologies manifested in the official texts can offer subsidies for the analysis of the conjugation of interests of different groups at the moments of agenda setting and policy formulation. On the other hand, the systematization of objectives and guidelines present in the documents favors the analysis of the different strategies adopted in the implementation processes.

## **Institutional Contexts**

This context is related to the analysis of the movement of policy through institutional channels. It involves analyzing the various institutional, organizational and hierarchical levels that are mobilized by the policy until it reaches the local level, in the territories. Rodrigues (2008, 2016) states that this context is considered one of the most important because, through it, it is possible to detect changes that occur during the course of the policy through institutional routes, through the processes, norms, routines, interactions and dynamics that shape the policies along their path through organizations, at the various levels and layers of the government structure and public arenas.

In this direction, Lejano (2012) asserts that policies are not merely implemented or put into practice in a linear and objective way. As policies come into contact with different institutional levels, connections and meanings are attributed to them, and they are therefore adapted to the contexts through which they transit.

Due to the characteristics of Brazilian federalism and the decentralization that permeates social, health, and education policies, it is also noted that there is a complex set of institutional layers and levels that contingent them along their trajectories. In the case of educational policy, the division of competencies, guaranteed by the 1988 Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), among the federated entities produces distinct levels and layers of execution: the federal government is responsible for formulating and coordinating policies that will be implemented by states and municipalities.

## **Experiences context**

According to Lejano (2012), the contexts in which policies are put into practice can only be understood by someone who has experienced them. According to the author, experience is configured as the practical knowledge of the actors involved in the political situation, including their knowledge, beliefs, ideologies, and conceptions.

The author explains his choice to base his model on experience by criticizing traditional models of analysis. He proposes that, unlike models that are based on measures, values, and rationalizations, analysts should seek authenticity, that is, the understanding of political situations based on the experience of the actors. According to the author, through dense description, the analyst can unveil, describe, and integrate different aspects of politics from different types of knowledge.



Lejano (2012) proposes, therefore, a methodological approach that allows actors who experience policies to list different dimensions of their experiences. It is necessary, then, to guarantee freedom for them to contain their experiences, preferably in more than one speech space. Among some of the possible methods, narratives and ethnographies stand out.

Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016), in turn, when dealing with professional cultures, systematized some elements that influence how policies are acted in school institutions. For the authors, values, training trajectories and length of time teachers have worked, as well as departmental and collaborative relationships in place in institutions, affect how policies are read and interpreted in schools. According to Ball, Bowe Gold (1992), these elements are subjective aspects of those who live the policies and, therefore, are of interest to analysts who seek to understand how policies are experienced. This is why, in this context, the analyst is interested in identifying and understanding the beliefs, values, perceptions, knowledge, everyday practices, and interactions that permeate policies throughout their implementation.

It is important to consider, however, a transversal character of the context of experience proposed here, which articulates it with other contexts. In other words, the experience is related to the view of the actors that act in the different levels, whether they are the ones who formulate, implement, or evaluate. This implies that, based on the experience of these subjects, it is possible to understand dimensions that concern, for example, not only their subjective issues, but also institutional aspects, events, influences of political conjunctures in the different federative levels, resources available for implementation, perceptions about the moments of the policies, about the other actors, about the territories, about the beneficiaries, among others. The experience reveals, therefore, the subjectivities of the policies.

### **Context of the territories**

The context of the territories is related to the analysis of local specificities, where the policy lands and materializes. It is in the local, daily practice that there is the mobilization of several actors for the policy to happen. In the case of educational policies, for example, they are mostly implemented in formal and non-formal school institutions. However, as Oliveira (2019) and Oliveira and Peixoto (2021) state, schools do not only materialize educational policies, but also other policies (cultural, health, security, etc.). Thus, according to Oliveira and Daroit (2020), the territory is also where these policies intersect and articulate.

Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012), when portraying the situated contexts and the material contexts, clarify that, in the territory, one can analyze the historical and local dimensions, as

well as budgets, infrastructure and other aspects that interfere in the way policies are implemented. In this direction, according to Rodrigues (2008, 2016), Oliveira and Daroit (2020) and Oliveira and Peixoto (2021), in the territory one can analyze cultures and local dynamics, policy recipients, mobilization and interactions of these actors and their relationship with the institutions that operate in these spaces.

### **Final remarks**

By articulating the contributions of Ball, Bowe, and Gold (1992), Ball (1994), Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016), Lejano (2012), Rodrigues (2008, 2016), Gussi and Oliveira (2016), Oliveira (2019), and Oliveira and Peixoto (2021), this article presents theoretical and methodological references for the analysis of contexts and trajectories of public policy implementation, incorporating educational policies and programs.

As shown in Figure 1, the five proposed contexts allow us to advance in the understanding of policy trajectories based on four interdependent assumptions. First, policy texts (laws, guidelines, programs) are not put into practice linearly and objectively because the contexts in which they are implemented are diverse and produce changes in policies. Second, consequently, policy analyses must contextualize multidimensionally their objects, processes and trajectories in order to avoid the risk of silencing or ignoring important dimensions of the policy universe in question. The distinct and multiple hierarchical levels linked to state and municipal education departments reflect this complexity, according to Lotta, Bauer, Jobim, and Merchán (2021). Thus, when implemented in a complex federative context like Brazil, the educational policy goes through multiple institutional levels until it reaches the local level, causing it to be re-signified, differentiating it from the official and "original" text.

The third point concerns subjectivities, cultures, daily practices, and interactions among actors, subjects, people, and citizens who are mobilized and coexist along the policy trajectories, including the dynamics associated with its implementation in educational institutions and spaces. These elements are specific to the policies and also constitute them, besides revealing aspects that are often unknown to managers and/or hidden by public action.

Finally, it is important to give visibility to the territories where the policies live, where they effectively and daily take place in the lives of the people they are meant for. Understanding the dynamics in these spaces is fundamental to unveil how citizens - students, families, education professionals, and other associated actors - perceive and translate public action and what effects such programs produce in their lives, in their ways of existing, relating, living

together, and acting. This dimension allows us to unveil how public action materializes on a daily basis, through the actions of the agents who work in the public equipment that coexist in these spaces. In the same way, evidence can be gathered on how agents (who act in the implementation process at the local level) and citizens (who are its addressees and target audience) modify the design of policies through their daily actions, even if this does not necessarily imply changes in the official texts.

Until the policies land at the local level, in the territories, a long chain - transversal, fluid, and dynamic - of decision-making processes, which extends through different levels, modifies their intentions and results. This chain triggers and mobilizes diverse actors, processes, knowledge, and practices, intertwining them. Such trajectories and contexts also bring to light the tensions, contradictions, challenges, advances, inflections, ruptures, crises, possibilities and potentialities linked to the life of policies, so that the analyses and evidence revealed are denser and, therefore, less naive.

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