

## RESPONSIVE PROCESSES IN THE DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF COEXISTENCE IN SCHOOLS

### *PROCESSOS RESPONSIVOS NO DESENHO, NA IMPLEMENTAÇÃO E NA AVALIAÇÃO DE PROGRAMAS NA ÁREA DA MELHORIA DA QUALIDADE DA CONVIVÊNCIA ESCOLAR*

### *PROCESSOS RESPONSIVOS EN EL DISEÑO, IMPLEMENTACIÓN Y EVALUACIÓN EN EL ÁREA DE MEJORÍA DE LA CALIDAD DE LA CONVIVENCIA ESCOLAR*

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**ABSTRACT:** Responsiveness means, in an intentional way, to create conditions to continuously scan and analyze situations and processes, collect expectations, opinions and necessities from people that receive or implement a program and, in the most open, agile and powerful possible way to react, modify actions, include new agents, invite for participation, and collectively construct a better program for everyone in every context. The objective of this paper is to discuss contributions of responsive processes in complex programs as well as to describe kinds and levels of responsiveness as those used in the program “Ethical Coexistence at School” facilitating the transposition to larger scale programs and to public policies.

**KEYWORDS:** Responsiveness. Coexistence. Programs. Public policy.

**RESUMO:** *Responsividade significa, de forma intencional, criar condições para continuamente escanear e analisar situações e processos, escutar expectativas, opiniões e necessidades das pessoas que recebem ou implementam um programa e, da maneira mais aberta, ágil e potente possível, reagir, modificar ações, incluir novos atores, convidar à participação e construir coletivamente um programa melhor para todos e para cada contexto. O objetivo desse artigo é discutir contribuições do processo responsivo em programas complexos, assim como descrever tipos e níveis de responsividade como os utilizados no programa “A Convivência Ética na Escola”, facilitando a transposição para programas de mais larga escala e políticas públicas.*

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Responsividade. Convivência. Programas. Políticas públicas.

**RESUMEN:** Capacidad de respuesta (responsividad) significa crear intencionalmente las condiciones para escanear y analizar continuamente situaciones y procesos, escuchar las expectativas, opiniones y necesidades de las personas que reciben o implementan un programa y, de la manera más abierta, ágil y poderosa posible, reaccionar, modificar acciones, incluir nuevos actores, invitar a la participación y construir colectivamente un mejor programa para todos y para cada contexto. El objetivo de este artículo es discutir las contribuciones del proceso de respuesta en programas complejos, así como describir tipos y niveles de responsividad como los utilizados en el programa "Convivencia ética en la escuela", facilitando la transposición a programas y políticas públicas a mayor escala.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Responsividad. Convivencia. Programas. Políticas Públicas.

## Theoretical Background

Discussions and research on public policy design and implementation over the past few years show both evolutions, ambiguities, and disputes. These evolutions and ambiguities reflect the dynamism and complexity of the civilizing process itself. Programs and policies for improving coexistence and advancing education are very different from programs created to solve other societal problems and also from missions created to deal with more systemic challenges that still follow a solution-seeking logic (MAZZUCATO, 2018). When the situation is complex, not definable and soluble as a problem, designing solutions, creating causal chain mechanisms and setting goals can be inhibiting, reductionist and more hindering, than helping (RITTEL; WEBBER, 1973). In terms of education and, mainly, of school coexistence, there will always be the need to continuously design, redesign and implement programs and reforms, since society moves in an endless process of transformations and, hopefully, advances. This does not mean inefficiency, on the contrary, it is a realistic look that usually confronts technocratic views (PELLIZZONI, 2001). Due to the complexity of actors and processes involved in this kind of challenge, before an implementation is consolidated, new reforms are already necessary (ELMORE, 1996; REIMERS, 2020).

To assume the opposite, that once and for all (or at least for a good while) we will solve the "problem" of education or coexistence leads, as we have seen, to frustration, accountability, and blame. The problem lies in viewing something that is procedural, evolving, never-ending, as a solvable problem (SINEK, 2019). Dealing with this challenge of improving society and education, accepting that they are totally imbricated, needs to be faced in a vision much more deontological than teleological; the arrival is not a fixed target, it will keep moving, changing;

it is not an increase in efficiency but a commitment and respect for diversity, for the reduction of inequalities and for a fairer coexistence. Learning to live together is looking at the process and not the arrival, at people and not performance results.

A society will be culturally rich and diverse if different identity, ethnic, and religious groups coexist. There will be heterogeneity in habits, worldviews, and value hierarchies, differences that invariably lead to tensions and conflicts. Understanding these tensions and conflicts as part of a natural, dynamic process of continuous accommodation and recognition of different identities and cultures implies recognizing and valuing the complexity inherent in living in a society like the present one, interconnected, both locally and globally, and, precisely for this reason, rich and diverse.

Promoting a school education that favors democratic coexistence today means educating to navigate the complexity of multiple worldviews and cultures, with their interfaces and connections that go far beyond the family interaction or the interaction restricted to a group of affinity. Interactions both transform the individual and, in a process of circular causality (MORIN, 2015), also transform the environment, structures, others, and the interactions themselves. Navigating complexity means sometimes letting go, sometimes adapting, sometimes transforming, and sometimes acting to transform. To understand, accept, and participate in a respectful and ethical way in this becoming depends on critical actions based on principles of dignity, justice, and solidarity. In a complex society it is not possible to pre-determine when to give in, when to convince, when to fight. It is intellectual and moral autonomy, which is based on principles, that allows each citizen to act by coordinating perspectives and contribute to a more just society (VINHA *et al.*, 2017)..

Virtually all documents that inspire and underpin educational policies contemplate training for life in society. The combination of all the general competencies described in the Common National Curricular Base - BNCC, for example, is necessary for ethical and democratic coexistence. The four pillars of education, described by Jacques Delors (1998), are necessary for ethical and democratic coexistence. However, although necessary, these competencies and pillars are not enough. The transformations need to be much more systemic, also involving the educator and his or her professional practice, they need to contemplate changes in the educational system as a whole, in its organization and structures (UNESCO, 2021).

Despite the recurring frustration for not seeing the goals stated in documents such as the National Education Plan and UNESCO's Education 2030 achieved, what we see is the sequence

and repetition, without due questioning, of models and processes of design and implementation of public policies.

Matland (1995), classifying the design and implementation of public policies, developed quadrants represented by two axes - ambiguity and conflict - and two values that can be assigned to these axes - high or low - resulting in policies whose implementation generates low conflict and low ambiguity, high conflict and low ambiguity, low ambiguity and high conflict, or high conflict and high ambiguity.

An example of a policy that generates low conflict and low ambiguity is the PNLD, the National Textbook Program in the Portuguese acronym, in which teachers choose books from a list and the government distributes them. There is little question that this is a good program and that the way it works is adequate. The level of discretion (ANDREWS; PRITCHETT; WOOLCOCK, 2017; LIPSKY, 2010) in this program is not disputed. Put another way, in the case of PNLD, the fact that teachers make the choice brings flexibility and is seen by educators as adequate. On the other hand, when there is no consensus on methods, practices, and/or technologies, the lack of discretion becomes a serious problem. A program like militarized schools, in which school management is imposed through strict rules and control to avoid ambiguities and conflicts, functions as a form of organization that relies on the use of power and intimidation and rejects plurality of thought and behavior, imposing a military logic to deal with non-military citizens, in this case public school students. A model that goes in the opposite direction of developing the values and skills necessary for life in a democratic and increasingly complex society (VINHA *et al.*, 2021a). This is a typical example of what David Snowden calls the collapse from "simple" to "chaos", when a complex situation is treated as if it were simple, obvious, imposing and assuming that there is "a best practice" (SNOWDEN; BOONE, 2007; SNOWDEN; GREENBERG; BERTSCH, 2020), when, in fact, this practice is far from sufficient and accepted.

Good programs and public policies in the area of coexistence recognize and respect the diversity of groups, views, and cultures. In this sense, what is ambiguous and uncertain is not the educational policy but the context in which the policy/program is inserted, which is complex and cannot be seen in a simplified way at the risk of mischaracterizing it, of being reductionist. The ambiguity in this case is not negative, it is the recognition of the need to coordinate different perspectives (HABERMAS, 2003; SELMAN, 2006) and, a program that promotes individual, collective, and organizational development can, using Matland's quadrants, contribute to transform high conflict and high ambiguity situations into low conflict and high ambiguity

situations. However, because of the program, it is the people in the program who change quadrants, who feel more comfortable to navigate through the complex without having to make a reduction from "complex to complicated", without giving up diversity, emerging cultures, creativity, and enchantment in exchange for standardization, tethers, and efficiency.

Implementing policies that recognize and deal with complexity without trying to reduce it goes through a completely different logic than the logic of planning and executing as rigid and separate stages (BRYSON *et al.*, 2021; SØRENSEN; TORFING, 2021). The planning phase is often reviewed with the participation of those who are implementing and those who are receiving the programs (ANDREWS; PRITCHETT; WOOLCOCK, 2017; FISHMAN *et al.*, 2013). Implementation evaluation is participatory and democratic (PATTON, 2010; STAKE, 2004; STUFFLEBEAM, 2001). The results of transformations go far beyond traditional indicators and come to rely on less structured, collectively constructed and analyzed evidence (INDEPENDENT GROUP EVALUATION, 2020).

In this article we will explore responsiveness, one of the most distinctive aspects of programs and public policies in the area of coexistence, which take complexity into account by generating transformations in a respectful way, involving participants and beneficiaries, without hurting existing cultures, in order to favor sustainability. Besides discussing the contributions of responsiveness in complex programs, we will describe types and levels of responsiveness based on the process developed in an ethical coexistence program organized in Brazilian schools as we will see below.

### **Levels and types of responsiveness**

Responsiveness is a rare and desired quality to be incorporated into public programs and policies. It means intentionally creating conditions to continuously scan and analyze situations and processes, listen to the expectations, opinions, and needs of the people who receive or implement the program, and, in the most open, agile, and powerful way possible, react, modify actions, include new actors, invite participation, and collectively build a better program for everyone and for each context.

As early as the 1970s, Robert Stake conceived of responsive evaluation. Since then, this type of evaluation has evolved and been endorsed by experts in the organization of procedures and processes to make program evaluation responsive (STAKE, 2004; STUFFLEBEAM, 2001). One of the most distinctive factors of responsive evaluation is to accept in advance that the understanding of the program, the objectives, the expectations for the results, and the most

appropriate procedures for achieving them are interpreted differently by those who conceived and designed it, and by those who receive it, i.e., the beneficiaries. Understanding these different understandings right from the start and generating alignment between those who design and those who receive as the program unfolds depends on respectful listening to the different points of view, eventual changes of direction, and a non-exempt participation of the evaluator, who also ends up playing the role of interpreter between designers/implementers and beneficiaries. For this reason, responsive evaluation is often called beneficiary-centered evaluation. Some of the negative points of this evaluation, such as the vulnerability of the evaluator to be overly influenced by the beneficiaries, the difficulty of monitoring multiple actors, and the danger of referrals that are too divergent from each other and from the original idea (STUFFLEBEAM, 2001), have been solved or minimized with the use of technology to broaden and deepen documented reflective participation, making expectations, suggestions, concerns visible and inviting interaction, generating in a way a peer validation and awareness of the complexity of the program to fit different contexts (VINHA *et al.*, 2020). This responsive evaluation augmented by technology allows working with an extended group of beneficiaries as if it were a focus group continued over time, and generate longitudinal case studies to understand transformation processes brought about by the program.

A program or public policy that adopts responsive evaluation, but does not incorporate responsive processes also in implementation and adaptability for redesign, loses coherence. To illustrate different types and levels of responsiveness we will use "Ethical Coexistence at School", which was a teacher training and school transformation program with differentiated and complementary actions aimed at improving the quality of school coexistence and the conflict resolution process, favoring the construction of a positive school climate (VINHA *et al.*, 2017; VINHA; NUNES; TOGNETTA, 2018), idealized by the Group of Studies and Research in Moral Education (GPEM) of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp) and the São Paulo State University (Unesp). Lasting from 24 to 36 months, the program was implemented in ten municipal elementary schools in two cities in the interior of São Paulo state.

The proposals were elaborated considering three interrelated paths: the interpersonal, the curricular and the institutional, which, in summary, consisted in insertion of a weekly discipline in the students' curricular grid so that coexistence and morality could be discussed; the implementation of spaces for participation, dialogue and conflict resolution, such as class assemblies and mediation procedures; youth protagonism proposals, such as the Help Teams; evaluation of the school climate and collective discussion of the results; in the construction of



a Coexistence Plan and in the follow-up of the main procedures implemented (VINHA *et al.* , 2017).

The most outstanding point of the program were the teacher training actions, reaching the entire teaching staff and managers in biweekly meetings, in addition to specific training for the teachers responsible for the new discipline. An educator-researcher connected to GEPEN, with specialized knowledge in the field of coexistence, was in charge of conducting the training meetings. This trainer always worked in a pair with a second, less experienced researcher, and both participated throughout the whole process of designing and implementing the program of weekly meetings held at the School of Education at Unicamp. In these meetings all the trainers/implementers reported on the week's activities, made suggestions, asked for support and supervision, and had exchanges among themselves. The supervision and discussions were conducted by senior researchers, who were also responsible for designing the program and liaising with the secretaries of education and regional directorships.

The formative meetings conducted by the trainers/implementers followed a pre-defined agenda with themes and methods, always reviewing with the group of teachers and managers (who in some schools participated very little) what changes were taking place, where the difficulties or resistance were, making room for demands not previously programmed.

Several of the ingredients of responsive evaluation were inserted in this program, in particular some of the innovations brought by technology, which allows greater listening and contact with beneficiaries and implementers. Besides traditional instruments such as questionnaires and interviews, a collaborative digital space was also used, in which reports and narratives were published, forming intra-school, inter-school, and implementer communities. The digital environment chosen was the Knowledge Forum. In the Knowledge Forum posts are given a title and can be connected to each other by arrows. A double click on any title opens the note for reading or commenting. The posts are dragged on the screen by the participants themselves in such a way that the visual organization makes sense to the group in a process of collective construction and advancement. The evaluators had access to the different communities and identified needs and possibilities for advancement while the program was happening (CAMPOS, 2020).

Responsiveness is linked both to the ability to listen and detect difficulties and opportunities and to the ability to react promptly and positively. A possible organization of the process of responsiveness in levels would be: implementer level; program level in the local

dimension; program level in the general dimension; level of extrapolation to other programs and policies.

In the Ethical Coexistence at School program, responsiveness happened at the four levels that characterize responsiveness. At the implementer level, responsiveness was directly linked to the professional's discretion. He made decisions not contemplated in the project, either in advance, for example, deciding not to use a trigger case that other implementers use in other schools because it is a particularly sensitive case for the school in which he is working; or during a planned action when he noticed that a discussion was generating stress and diverging from the original proposal and acted to change the direction of the conversation, shortening the time, changing the dynamics of participation; or even after a planned action when, for example, he decided to talk separately to the school manager, who showed apprehension after a moment of empowerment and demands from teachers. As we can see, at this level, for the program to be more responsive to the moment and to develop better, the implementer can eliminate, modify or insert an action; he/she can keep actions as planned, but change his/her own mediation and conduction strategies; he/she can provoke deeper reflections, making provocations or, still, take care of the group's working climate by softening interventions. This kind of performance demands that the implementer be a reflexive professional (ALARCÃO, 1996), demands a deep understanding of the program and a capacity to read the context aiming at advances that is translated into his/her praxis, very much in line with Perkins' (1998, p.7) definition of understanding "to understand is to be able to think and act flexibly with what one knows".

The responsiveness of the program at the local level can be understood as decisions, modifications, and incorporation of contributions that happen in the school. Unlike decisions made by the implementer, there were cases for which the demand came from the school itself, from the implementer's reading and analysis, from data collected via instruments and evaluation processes, which pointed to the need for the program to be modified for a particular school. This modification could be in the harmonization with already existing projects, in the reaction to a more immediate need by inverting the working order of some theme, eliminating an entire module because of time constraints, giving up the use of technology, or on the contrary, taking advantage of already existing facilities, not creating help teams in a particular school, etc. The modification of the program, adapting it to a school, is, therefore, contextual, and there is no gain of scale, i.e., nothing guarantees that at a later time or under other conditions these modifications would be made again in this or in other schools. It should be noted, however, that



this flexibility is important, given the specific needs of the school, and the resulting learning can eventually be incorporated into the program as a whole.

Responsiveness at the general level of the program also comes from readings, listening, analysis, and demands, but represents a modification, adaptation, and improvement of the program for all schools, i.e., it is understood as the possibility of changing the program while it is happening. After a year of implementation of the program, the perception that some actions had been carried out by the schools in a superficial way, without much resistance, but also without much reflection. Then, as part of the program for all schools, knowledge construction cycles were introduced, collective procedures to work on the themes in order to provoke engagement and initial disequilibrium, search for expansion of knowledge, awareness about changes in posture and perspectives after getting to know those of specialists and colleagues, and collective decision making to use the new knowledge in processes that interfere with the prevailing culture. Such a decision is not made by a single implementer, it is matured by a body of professionals that accompanies the implementation, be they the original designers of the program, be they evaluators, or the set of implementers themselves interacting with each other. It is evident here that programs that are planned, implemented, and evaluated only at the end, using experimental or quasi-experimental methods, have no way of being responsive at this level of "in-flight" change.

A final level of responsiveness refers to legacy learning for other programs, or later versions of the same program when applied at another time, in other contexts. Here, from the results and critical analysis performed by multiple actors, lessons learned and a redesign of both the program and implementation methods come in. This is where one can reflect on the program's contribution to longer-term transformations that connect to other programs and needs (INDEPENDENT GROUP EVALUATION, 2020), with the sustainability and scale that will be discussed below.

### **Scale, sustainability and final remarks**

As seen, responsiveness relies heavily on the reflective role of implementers, a powerful invitation to beneficiary participation, evaluation assuming a role of listening, provocation, and analysis, and program designers continuously interested in the unfolding of actions and open to constant reformulation (VINHA *et al.*, 2021b). This view is consistent with the description presented initially about navigating complexity and considering and coordinating multiple perspectives.

Designing programs so that this flexibility, openness, and responsiveness are also realized on a large scale (NUNES; VINHA, 2016), for example, for all schools in a state or municipal network, means from the outset thinking of the program as public policy. In this case, the role of the implementer-trainer often blends with existing functions in the networks themselves, the role of responsive evaluation blends with characteristics of educators who reflect and research on their own practice. The incorporation of changes in the program, either at the local or global level, can be thought of from deliberate collaborative processes in communities of practice. Evaluation takes on the character of development.

When incorporated into large-scale programs, responsiveness has the role of promoting the connection between the various levels of transformation: individual; collective, whether at the local level of a school or at the general level of an entire network; and organizational, questioning existing structures and favoring the emergence of new configurations. This intertwining between individual, collective, and organizational transformations is fundamental for the viability and acceptance of profound changes, which take place in the short, medium, and long term, and which are processes of advancement and sustainable culture change.

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