

## Negotiation of curricular policies-practices: teachers' professional development oriented towards curricular decision-making

### *Negociação das políticas/práticas curriculares: o desenvolvimento profissional de professores(as) orientado para a decisão curricular*

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to highlight the possibilities and impossibilities of policies/programs negotiation processes to contribute to the teachers' professional development oriented towards curricular decision-making. Using the defense of autonomy of the exercise of teaching enactment, it is considered that professional development permeates the idea of teachers constituting themselves as curricular decision-makers, understood as capacity for action that is developed from the articulation between individual efforts of the subject, available resources and contextual factors. The theoretical-methodological orientation is based on the unstable and undecidable relationship between particularity and universality. The locus of data collection on curricular policies/practices was the municipality of Caruaru, located in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, with the material available on the Caruaru Platform *Instituto Qualidade no Ensino* (IQE) [Quality in Teaching Institute] and the IQE official website. The analysis of these materials shows disputes around the meaning of curricular policies/practices in this municipality built from the discourses of global educational reforms and national policies that have been proposing, through curricular standardization, the attempt to close the production of contextual curricular responses. However,

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despite these limitations, it is believed that there is a possibility for teachers to act in the structure gaps to dispute, along with policies, other meanings of teaching enactment that stimulate professional development based on autonomy and considering teaching knowledge.

*Keywords:* Curricular policies/practices. Curricular decision-making. Professional development.

## RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo evidenciar as possibilidades e as impossibilidades de processos de negociação das políticas/dos programas contribuírem para o desenvolvimento profissional de professores(as) orientado para a decisão curricular. Recorrendo à defesa da autonomia do exercício da atuação docente, considera-se que o desenvolvimento profissional perpassa a ideia dos(as) professores(as) se constituírem como decisores curriculares, entendida como capacidade de ação que se desenvolve a partir da articulação entre os esforços individuais do sujeito, os recursos disponíveis e os fatores contextuais. A orientação teórico-metodológica seguida tem por base a relação instável e indecidível entre particularidade e universalidade. A recolha de dados de políticas/práticas curriculares teve por *locus* o município de Caruaru, Pernambuco, com o material disponível na Plataforma Instituto Qualidade no Ensino (IQE) Caruaru e o *site* oficial do IQE. A análise desses materiais evidencia disputas em torno da significação das políticas/práticas curriculares no município construídas a partir dos discursos das reformas educacionais globais e das políticas nacionais que vêm propondo, por meio da padronização curricular, a tentativa de fechamento da produção de respostas curriculares contextuais. No entanto, mesmo diante dessas limitações, acredita-se que existe a possibilidade de os(as) professores(as) agirem nas brechas da estrutura para disputar, com as políticas, outros sentidos de atuação docente que estimulem o desenvolvimento profissional baseado na autonomia e na consideração dos saberes docentes.

*Palavras-chave:* Políticas/práticas curriculares. Decisão curricular. Desenvolvimento profissional.

## Introduction

This paper accounts for a study that, focusing on education policies and, within them, the curricular policies of Basic Education, analyzes disputes around meanings attributed to them. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight the possibilities and impossibilities that the processes of negotiating policies/programs offer for the professional development of teachers oriented to a curricular decision-making. Thus, the epistemological positioning surrounds the defense of the autonomy of the exercise of the teaching performance (GROCHOSKA; GOUVEIA, 2020), understanding that professional development also permeates the idea of teachers constituting themselves as curricular decision-makers.

The defense of the teaching autonomy is justified and enrolled in the scenario of constant attempts to subaltern and regulate the work of the teacher (DIAS; GABRIEL, 2021), estimating its performance from a strictly instrumental and technical perspective. These growing interventions (of pedagogical/curricular/organizational character), with

roots in private segments, are present and influence the very public policies of education. From the empty signifier “Quality Education”, there is a bet on privatization of the education system (GABRIEL *et al.*, 2020) presented as the possibility of supplying what “lack” to education (MACEDO, 2017). Upon being perceived in this place of absence, school has been subjected to new political arrangements that produce tensions and challenges in the performance of the teacher, specifically in their curriculum practices.

In this orientation, we can see that, due to a social context strongly marked by the demands of capital, education presents itself as an important tool to form the worker with the characteristics required by the market, such as flexibility, efficiency and polyvalence (DIAS; GABRIEL, 2021). Thus, the principles of neoliberal economies materialize a discursive rationality that permeates political, economic, social and cultural production (HYPOLITO, 2021) and have been influenced by the educational reforms that, based on efficiency and accountability discourses (NÓVOA, 2017), individually make teachers responsible for the success or failure of teaching-learning and school processes, not guaranteeing principles of social justice (FRITSCHT; LEITE, 2019; LEITE; SAMPAIO, 2020) to all students for whom it must be destined.

Marks of this orientation lead to the performance of the teacher to be measured through the learning results arising (not only, but also) of external evaluations, although the necessary conditions are not given to act in accordance with the specific situations of each context and what is necessary for the students. This liability attributed to the teachers brings them closer to the role of applicators of the centralized curriculum prescriptions, focused on the final results of the students, and pushes them away from a sense of autonomy, as curricular decision-making teachers, to make contextualized options of the teaching activity. The autonomy of teachers lies, therefore, in the fact that they need to meet the requirements of policies without considering the contextual factors.

By recognizing the ability of the teacher to be a curricular decision-maker in the use of his power of agency (PRIESTLEY; BIESTA; ROBINSON, 2015), we understand that this is an action that is developed from the articulation between the subject’s individual efforts, available resources and factors that facilitate it. Therefore, we consider that, among the elements that interfere with professional development oriented to the curricular decision, is the privatization process that Brazilian education goes through. In this process, the private sector has disputed the public fund as well as the content of education public policies, hindering the existence of conditions for teachers to assume curricular decision-making roles.

Having this conceptual orientation as a base and being supported by the Discourse Theory (DT) (LACLAU, 2011), we analyzed the discourse of the political programs of the municipality of Caruaru, located in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, namely the discourse of the *Instituto Qualidade no Ensino* (IQE) – Quality Institute in Teaching –, which presents itself as one of the main policies/programs of this municipality. The choice for this research locus is justified because, for the past ten years, it has been

presenting political orientation for public education, based on the contours of the public-private relationship. With this analysis, we seek to highlight the possibilities of a constitution of practices that are linked to demands from the public and the private sector, and that produce public policies with new identities. Our claim is to demonstrate the processes of negotiation of policies/programs that may or may not contribute to the professional development oriented to the constitution of curricular decision-making teachers. Thus, inscribed from a perspective that understands that the meanings produced in the investigated context are contingent and not stabilized, the analysis was performed considering that the hegemonized senses are the result of disputes around the meaning process.

Curriculum as an empty signifier: What particular meanings are being universalized?

By operating from a perspective of valuing the contingency, precarious and provisional character of all sedimentation (LOPES; BORGES, 2015), we understand curriculum only partially inscribed in fixed senses, without an essence linked to its meaning. Thus, with these authors, we question the “essentialist fantasy” that it is possible to build a full identity of what may be a curriculum and that it is possible to give meaning to the curriculum once and for all. We consider that, although we are called to mean the world, we can only speak of efforts to control and stabilize the curriculum in one sense; hence, with them, we question the “[...] attempt to stabilize what is impossible to be stable” (LOPES; BORGES, 2015, p. 503).

When we deny the existence of a last foundation, we operate with the radical idea that other senses are always possible, that the senses are already being different. This brings us to the understanding that it is the “[...] contingency that makes events possible, but not necessary and mandatory. This guidance refers to unpredictability, the absence of certainties, the difference [...]” (LOPES; BORGES, 2015, p. 498). In this conception, curriculum reveals itself as an empty signifier (LACLAU, 2011), which, being inscribed in the logic of hegemony, enables a particular sense to present itself in its universal character. This position implies that the senses of curriculum we debate in the space of our argument are particular senses that, in having their particularity emptied and building equivalences with other particular senses, have (partially) settled and assumed the position of universal sense.

In this line, in our discursive position, we perceive the curriculum as a formative project assumed in schools as a result, at the same time, the guidelines of global and local curricular policies and the productions daily and contextually carried out by school actors (MELO, 2019). In this understanding, curriculum is the materialization of the subjects’ experiences in the daily lives of schools that establish relationships with each other and with the knowledge conveyed and built within these spaces. Therefore, “[...] it is a constitutive element – as every educational act is – of subjectivity, subjectivities, subjects, social subjects” (ALBA, 2014, p. 210). Perceived as a social construction (MELO; ALMEIDA; LEITE, 2020), curriculum brings the historical marks of the

subjects who were involved in it, not only being a bureaucratic document, but an expression of the daily life experienced by the groups, even if these experiences are not officially systematized in school. Consequently, we recognize the importance of

[...] overcoming both models that understand State relations about the practice of schools and verticalized, reserving the subordinate role of implementation to schools and an omnipotent action to the State, and analyses that disconnect the practices of relationships with broader social and political-economic processes, mediated by the State. (LOPES, 2006, p. 35).

However, it is precisely in this place of subordination that curricular policies produce senses of curriculum, associating the school with a place of application of prior and externally defined proposals, which do not consider the specific demands of institutions and their subjects, nor promote their participation in its elaboration. Having neoliberalism as a dominant version, we are increasingly subject to the logic of the financial sector, which puts various societies in a permanent state of crisis (SANTOS, 2020). In the midst of this constant crisis – which aims to never be resolved, but legitimize the concentration of wealth and, consequently, social inequality – have been imposed on education models of organization based on marketing principles. In this place of crisis, education, especially public, is seen in the face of what is lacking, namely the lack of quality. For this reason, a perspective of education is installed as quasi-market from the understanding that only through market forces can the educational system improve its quality and efficiency (ALARCON-LEIVA; JOHNSTON; FRITES-CAMILLA, 2013). The attempt is to close the sense production, seeking to expel from the politics other forms of social organization. If there are no other possibilities, what remains is to adopt a certain orthodoxy of what curricular policies should be.

In this neoliberal discursive production, justified to improve the quality of education, one of the solutions proposed by policies – not only in Brazil, but also internationally from the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) – is curricular standardization (MARINHO; LEITE; FERNANDES, 2019), which implies a prescribed curriculum to be implemented throughout the national territory, seeking to curb contextual curricular productions. In Brazil, the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (known by the acronym *BNCC*) – the Brazilian Common Core State Standards – is one of the representations of this movement, intending to determine what school and its teachers can and should teach. Based on the principle of curriculum centralization, as well as the American Common and the Australian Curriculum, *BNCC* follows a ceiling rationality, a predetermined limit of what students should know when they finish school (OLIVEIRA; FRANGELLA; MACEDO, 2017).

Privileging experts and subordinate debate with school communities, as stated by the National Association of Research and Graduate Studies on Education – ANPEd (2017), *BNCC* focuses on the performance of students, as well as all policies that accompany

standardization, but not their global performance, favoring only the disciplines that are the target of national exams and tests, such as the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (ENEM) – a national High School exam to make entrance into university possible –, the *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica* (SAEB) – a system that evaluates Basic Education in Brazil –, and international exams, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Thus, it is a policy that reduces the process of school education

[...] to a listing of content and skills, ignoring the whole social process of agglutination permitted by the existing Guidelines, as well as the teacher work already underway, the curricula in progress in schools and everything that happens in teacher and student relationships, in their multiple actions. (OLIVEIRA; FRANGELLA; MACEDO, 2017, p. 4).

In this markedly neoliberal scenario, the quality of education would also be achieved by new forms of management articulated to performance and productivity dimensions, materializing in corporate management that is very close to the business model. These new forms of management are also forged through the public-private partnerships that are more based on the idea of “[...] privatization of public services and the sub-financing of those left for being of no interest to the capital” (SANTOS, 2020, p 24) than in the establishment of fair relationships between both sectors. The success, therefore, of neoliberal policy also lies in reducing the differences between the public and the private, having as an effect the notion that the private optimizes the resources that would generally be dilapidated by public organisms seen as inefficient (ALARCÓN-LEIVA, 2017).

In an education strongly marked by a private management model, curricular policies follow perspectives based on the accountability (AFONSO, 2019) of schools and teachers. Submitted to external evaluation policies, curricular practices of teachers are being defined by examinations that seek to indicate the performance of students, limited to specific areas. The same happens in the *BNCC* through the linking of national evaluations to school contents (ANPED, 2017). Thus, it is taught what is foreseen in external exams, as there are punishment or prize policies depending on the results obtained.

These new strategies and technologies for the regulation of teaching performance and work of the school, which argue to raise the school results seen as the only relevant indicators of an alleged quality and efficiency, introduces incentives that generate competition between schools and are based on the belief that this would raise school quality (ALARCÓN-LEIVA, 2017). In this scenario, we can already visualize some disputes around the significance of the curriculum. If, on the one hand, we have neoliberal policies that seek to define how education should materialize itself, on the other hand, we have educators and researchers who conceive schools as curricularly

intelligent (LEITE, 2005), capable of building, from the involvement and collective commitment of their actors, curricula that respond to the contextual demands.

## **The curricular decision-making as an element of professional development**

As we mentioned, we bring meanings of curriculum that could be others. However, our inscription in the field of post-foundational discussion enables us, from discursive articulations, to understand it as a living element that influences practice and is influenced by it. In view of that, and corroborating Felicio and Possani (2013, p. 131), “[...] curriculum [...] is a land for multiple agents, whose dynamics involve diverse mechanisms, in a confluence of practices”. In other words, thinking about the curriculum is also to think of curricular policies, the social and historical contexts that influence the elaboration of these policies, and their re-elaboration in local contexts through the curricula practiced by teachers, students, managers, aiming at the production and socialization of knowledge.

As we have been indicating throughout this paper, it is necessary to capture the curriculum in its complexity, in the articulation between what is prescribed and its reinvention in practice. Thus, curriculum as a device of formation requires the understanding of the contexts, actors and intentions that constitute it. Thinking about it beyond the bureaucratizing sense requires considering the teacher as a curricular producer, displacing his place as an executor of external demands to that of a curricular decision agent (SANTOS; LEITE, 2020).

In this orientation, we consider that “[...] subjects who materialize curriculum are also builders of curricular policies, at the moment they are re-signified at the local level, that is, within the school space” (ALMEIDA; SILVA, 2014, p. 1442) – re-signification that often implies a rupture of what is set for the production of the new. It is in this direction and in this understanding that, inscribed in the power of the agency of the teachers (SANTOS; LEITE, 2020; BIESTA; PRIESTLEY; ROBINSON, 2015), we highlight the possibilities of construction and curriculum realization that meet the characteristics of educational contexts and promote social justice (FRITSCHT; LEITE, 2019; LEITE; SAMPAIO, 2020), as well as the professional development of the teacher (GROCHOSKA; GOUVEIA, 2020).

The concept of agency has been used in recent research to demonstrate the ability of actors to critically build/forgo their own answers to problematic situations (BIESTA; TEDDER, 2006). Having as its premise the quality of the engagement of actors in temporally situated action contexts, the agency does not concern an individual quality of the actors, that is, it is not something that people have, such as private property, capacity or competence, but something that people do (BIESTA; PRIESTLEY; ROBINSON, 2015; SANTOS; LEITE, 2020).

In this sense, the concept of agency helps us perceive the ability of teachers to assume

the position of curriculum decision-makers, understanding that not only do they apply the demands of policies, but they also build responses to situations that emerge in the specificity of their professional performance. This concept also demonstrates that there is no essence linked to the ability of the teacher to be a decision-maker, because it is not an individual competence or merit, but rather an action that is developed from the articulation between subject's individual efforts, available resources and contextual factors.

Having these ideas as reference, we understand that considering the role of the teacher in the delimitation of the formative project of the school (curriculum) and understanding that the school space is able to produce efficient answers to everyday problems, is to give perspective to the possibilities of teacher professional development. It is to consider the teaching protagonism, not in an individual dimension as neoliberal policies conceive, but as a collective and shared project that also occurs in the spaces of the teaching action. As Nóvoa (2002, p. 60) points out “[...] the professional development of teachers has to be articulated with the schools and their projects”.

In line with Imbernon (2009, p. 77), when he states that professional development “[...] is a set of factors that enable or prevent teachers from advancing in identity”, we understand that a firm position of curricular decision-maker is one of the factors that can promote the construction of an autonomous and creative teaching identity. In addition, professional development, referring to “[...] any systematic intention to improve professional practice, beliefs and professional knowledge, with the objective of increasing teaching quality” (IMBERNON, 2004, p. 45), can be associated with the power of agency of the teachers in the options that they make in relation to the curricular decision.

Supported by these ideas, in the analysis of the discursive enunciation of the curricular policies/practices of Basic Education, we seek to highlight how they may or may not contribute to the professional development oriented to the constitution of curricular decision-making teachers. For this, the following aspects were considered: incompleteness and provisional as marks of the methodological path; equivalences that constitute the IQE [Quality in Teaching Institute] as a program/policy; disputes around the significance of curricular policies/practices.

### **Incompleteness and provisionality: marks of a post-foundational methodological path**

Following a methodological path that is based on the premise of the unstable and undecidable relationship between particularity and universality, in which “[...] the universal has no content of its own, but it is an absent fullness [...], [which] only may arise from the particular” (LACLAU, 2011, p. 40), we understand that policies/practices, although they appear a universal character, are constituted by particular contents that



symbolize a full representation, which is never achieved, but it is required. Particular senses may have the appearance of universal senses, in other words, they can present themselves as unique possibilities, as if there is an essence linked to what they mean, but in fact they only adopt the role of universality that will always be precarious and not saturated, because there is “[...] a succession of finite and particular identities that try to assume universal tasks that surpass them” (LACLAU, 2011, p. 42).

Reaffirming the incompleteness of any significance process (GABRIEL, 2018), we are interested in understanding how policies/practices in the context of the municipality of Caruaru, Pernambuco, Brazil, dispute the production of senses that make it (im) possible for teachers to assume the position of curricular decision-makers, promoting (or not) the professional development oriented in this direction.

The choice for the municipality of Caruaru, located in the *agreste* region of the state of Pernambuco, to conduct the study occurred due to the result of other studies (MELO, 2019; SILVA, 2020; VELOSO, 2021) that indicated that the municipality has followed the state model of Pernambuco and sought to bind to the foundations and educational groups of the private sector. Thus, understanding, with Hypolito (2021), that the neoliberal privatization of education assumes different contours, it seems interesting to accompany what materializes in Caruaru, whose public-private relations are based on the erasure (or redefinition) of the boundaries between what public would be and what private would be.

In the analysis, from the initial survey, we identified the presence of the following policies/programs in the municipality: *Tempo Certo* [Right Time]; *Comunidade Leitora* [Reading Community]; *Programa Criança Alfabetizada* [Literate Child Program]; *Gincana X* [School competition X]; *Aprender com Sucesso* [Learn successfully]; *Todos Aprendem* [Everyone Learns]; *Qualifica EJA* [Qualifying youth and adult education]; *Formação de Liderança para Gestores* [Leadership Formation for Managers]; *CAEd<sup>1</sup> Fluência* [CAEd Fluency]; *SAEC<sup>2</sup> Avaliação e IQE* [SAEC Evaluation and IQE]. It is noteworthy that the IQE, present in Caruaru (among comings and goings) since 2009, has become recurring in the discourses of the network teachers as a policy/program that has been impacting the production of their curricular practices (MELO, 2019; SILVA, 2020; VELOSO, 2021).

By investing “[...] in the promotion of formations and incorporation of pedagogical materials in schools that seek to centralize in the curricular practices of teachers the conformation mechanisms with external evaluations” (VELOSO, 2021, p. 88), the *IQE* has been constituted as one of the main policies/programs of the municipality. Therefore, the analysis of the material available on the *IQE* Caruaru Platform is

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<sup>1</sup> *Centro de Políticas Públicas e Avaliação da Educação (CAEd)* – Public Policy Center and Education Evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação de Caruaru (SAEC)* – Caruaru Education Evaluation System.

justified, corresponding to the pedagogical content aimed at teachers. It is important to mention that the material analyzed corresponds to the year 2022, for the early grades of Elementary School (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade). This material concerned the didactic sequences of Portuguese and Mathematics, and accounted for 20 Portuguese sequences and nine Math sequences, distributed between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. It was also considered the information available on the *IQE* official website that helped scale which equivalences the policy/program performed to be constituted.

## **Equivalences that constitute the IQE as a program/policy**

In order to analyze how the *IQE* is constituted as a policy/program that has been in the last years being responsible for (partially) fixing curriculum senses, knowledge, learning, assessment in curricular policies/practices in the municipality of Caruaru, it was relevant to understand how the hegemonic operation that is universalizing the particular contents of these senses is constructed. To this end, we mobilized the logic of equivalence, which is “[...] characterized by the articulation of different elements that are approached, not because they are equal, but precisely because they dilute their differences for the hegemonization of a particular sense” (DIAS; GABRIEL, 2021, p. 1307). The logic of equivalence enables us to understand the process of meaning that is established – because the universal has no specific content and sustains itself in empty signifiers – and identify which different elements have approached to hegemonize certain senses that are the basis of the *IQE*.

Being born in 1990 from a working group composed of entrepreneurs and principals of state schools, the *IQE* aimed to implement the *Programa Qualidade na Escola* (Quality Program in School) and, therefore, improve the quality of Elementary School in public schools. With a pilot project instituted in the School System of the state of São Paulo from the development of didactic-pedagogical materials, the *IQE*, in 1999, defined as second locus of its performance the city of Recife, Pernambuco, where “[...] the volunteering program began involving employees of partner and community companies” (IQE, 2022a, n.p.). Thus, there is a historical inscription of the presence of the Institute in the State of Pernambuco, this presence expanded to the hinterlands of the state in 2006. In 2009, it arrived in the municipality of Caruaru through the *Qualiescola* [quality/school] Program, and currently it has been linked to the production of teaching materials, teacher education and external evaluation.

Given this, we recognize that the *IQE* arises in the articulation between the public and private sector, being “[...] a civil association of educational and social assistance, without economic purposes, [...] maintained with the support of private companies and partnerships with governments” (IQE, 2022b, n.p.). Thus, the *IQE* is based on the narrow relationship between the public sector and the private sector that works as – to use Hypolito’s (2021) metaphor – a revolving door where it is not known who comes

in, who leaves, with whom one enters or with whom one leaves, whose boundaries that delimit each sector are erased or reconfigured.

The erasure of these borders, better saying, the production of new borders, corresponds to the attempt to convert the “public service” into “private service”, with the parameter the form of business organization (FREITAS, 2018). The *IQE* is therefore assuming itself as a “private provider of education”, building a discourse in which the answers to public school problems would be given by external agents. Presenting as a mission “[...] to promote and develop educational projects that aim for social inclusion through the improvement of the quality of basic public education” (IQE, 2022b, n.p.), an articulation between public and private as a replacement of public control of institutions by private economic groups is established. With this, we are not denying the political force of the articulation between the sectors; on the contrary, we are problematizing the constitution of the hegemonic border between them (GABRIEL, 2018) that marks the *IQE* sense production.

This production of senses circulates around significant quality, which is directly related to the learning results and the performance of the teachers (DIAS; GABRIEL, 2021). Hence, there is an investment in an organized sense of quality around the need to overcome the weaknesses of the public school, whose inefficiency, as warned by Macedo (2014, p. 1538), “[...] works as a constitutive exterior which creates a network of demands around reforms marked by market logic. The hegemony of the new form of sociability is guaranteed by the expulsion of the old forms of education management as a public good”.

Registered in this articulation between public and private, the *IQE* does not bet on the autonomy of schools and their teachers, nor in the curricular decentralization. Its claim is “[...] improving the efficiency of teaching in public schools” (IQE, 2022a, n.p.), by promoting changes in the classroom from “[...] tool restructuring and training of the institution’s directive body and professionals of the Education Secretariat to students’ evaluation, mainly through the requalification and monitoring of teachers” (IQE, 2022a, n.p.). Its claim is thus giving schools something they lack. There is no recognition of the qualification potential of schools, which would allow them to know and, from this, plan their future actions towards continuous improvement. On the contrary, the need for formatting educational spaces by specialists and the definition of how their professionals need to act is perceived.

The training of teachers is carried out with a view to their instrumentalization to what is proposed by the *IQE*, and they are not invited to manage and make decisions, but rather to implement specific programs and evaluation tools which will later serve to support their planning. This, as can be inferred, is a discursive production that is articulated with a global movement for the constitution of policies inscribed in the neoliberal influence. Accordingly, the production of educational reforms based mainly on curricular standardization and centralization has been expressed in Caruaru, both

from the *BNCC* – as a policy adopted nationally and, therefore, by the municipality – and from the program proposed by the *IQE*.

One of the elements that ensures compliance with the program proposed by the *IQE* is the evaluation of students “[...] to diagnose deficiencies and difficulties that must be overcome” (IQE, 2022a, n.p.). As a consequence, the teaching activity is regulated through those evaluations that are more concerned with what the program understands is necessary for students to know, and less with what teachers understand is necessary for the students to know. Thus, the *IQE* promotes the regulation of the teacher’s work, “[...] having as reference the necessary actions to achieve a certain point previously defined to be achieved” (MARTINS; GABRIEL, 2021, p. 18). Therefore, the investment is in a unique, plastered and previously defined performativity that teachers must guarantee through compliance with the program.

Consequently, there is no investment in professional development oriented towards the constitution of autonomous and creative practices. Recognizing, as García (1999) stated, that professional development, in addition to contemplating the quality of teacher training, also includes the ability of teachers to act in the face of the dilemmas of their work, we found that, for the *IQE*, this ability needs to be given to teachers through predefined models. Spaces for professional development are reduced by resorting to strategies that try to control what teachers can and should do.

In summary, the *IQE* builds a discursive network in which the quality of education is achieved through the definition of a standardized curriculum, defined by agents external to the school, requiring training for teachers to meet the objectives defined by those who are alien to the needs of each classroom. It is about a concept of quality that is guaranteed by regulation promoted by assessments that measure whether students have followed the paths previously defined by the program. However, to what extent is it possible to determine these paths? For this, we resorted to the analysis of the didactic-pedagogical material provided by the *IQE* to be implemented in the classroom by the teachers and that is also presented in this article.

## **Disputes around the meaning of curricular policies/practices: analysis of the IQE didactic-pedagogical material**

On its official website, the *IQE* informs that, through its programs, it seeks to teach teachers how to teach, so they must be “[...] guided, accompanied and encouraged to develop new ways of teaching” (IQE, 2022c, n.p.). In this discourse, senses of accountability of the teacher are inscribed, since, according to the discourse to which it resorts, changes in the individual forms of the teaching activity would be enough to guarantee the supposed quality of education. In this act of blaming teachers, as stated by Dias (2016, p. 599), “[...] the accountability of the school and the agents that work in it in relation to the results that are expected from the institution by society” is part

of a common language that has been present in recent years, notably in the educational reforms that have happened in Latin America (ALARCÓN-LEIVA, 2017; BEECH, 2009). There is no talk of the need to transform the very structure of education, or to question social structures, but rather the individual transformation of the teachers in the direction of what is prescribed and that ignores the real situations.

It is perhaps because it considers that it is enough to act on the teachers, that the *IQE* also focuses on the production of didactic-pedagogical materials that must be implemented in the classroom. Inscribing the teacher as the one who needs to change his/her way of teaching, the *IQE* scales a change to be defined externally to the place of professional activity. For this purpose, in Caruaru, the *IQE* provides a website where it is possible for the teacher to access pedagogical content related to the didactic sequences that correspond to the disciplines of Portuguese and Mathematics. As noted, the objective of: “*Guaranteeing every Brazilian child access to quality education*” (IQE, 2022c, n.p., emphasis added) is reached exclusively through these areas of knowledge and using the teaching materials of these areas.

The choice for these areas is linked to the perspective of accountability present in curricular policies, not only in Brazil, but also in the world (AFONSO, 2019). In this logic of subordination, and as Hypolito (2021) argues, global educational reforms suppose as a goal to improve the quality of education, having as one of the focuses the disciplines considered nuclear, precisely because “[...] national and international examinations and tests (PISA, ENEM etc.) are based on these disciplines” (HYPOLITO, 2021, p. 4). Thus, the *IQE* justifies the focus on these areas of knowledge based on results of external evaluations by indicating that: “Although 98% of Brazilian children between 6 and 14 years old have access to public school, it is proven by several national and international entities linked to education that Brazilian students have a poor performance in reading, text interpretation and mathematics” (IQE, 2022c, n.p.).

The signifier learning is thus articulated with senses of education restricted to Portuguese and Mathematics, given that standardized tests and large-scale evaluations focus on these disciplines. The professional development of teachers is restricted to what the program proposes, which, in turn, is guided by external evaluation policies. As Alarcon-Leiva (2017) concluded, the increasingly interventionist regulations materialized in a centralized curriculum and in standardized evaluations are constituted as a landmark of professional development characterized by performativity and concern for quantifiable results.

The analysis shows that the didactic sequences have clear binding to the *BNCC*, nominally bringing the national policy, in the case of sequences related to the Portuguese discipline, to frame each themed field mentioned, as shown in the information of the documents presented in Chart 1.

CHART 1 – Relation with BNCC

Teacher guidelines	
1st grade	With an eye on the BNCC: LITERARY ARTISTIC FIELD – Field related to participation in reading, fruition and production of literary and artistic texts, representative of cultural and linguistic diversity, which favor aesthetic experiences. Some genres of this field: legends, myths, fables, tales, chronicles, songs, poems, visual poems, folk texts, comics, comic strips, charges/cartoons, among others.
2nd grade	With an eye on the BNCC: LITERARY ARTISTIC FIELD – Field related to participation in situations of reading, fruition and production of literary and artistic texts, representative of cultural and linguistic diversity, which favor aesthetic experiences. Some genres of this field: legends, myths, fables, tales, chronicles, ditties and songs, visual poems, folk texts, comics, comic strips, charges/cartoons, among others.
4th grade	With an eye on the BNCC: FIELD OF STUDY AND RESEARCH PRACTICES – Field related to participation in reading/writing situations that make it possible to understand the expository and argumentative texts, language and practices related to study, research and scientific dissemination, favoring learning inside and outside the school. Some genres of this field in print or digital media: school task statements; reports of experiments; tables; graphics; charts; infographics; diagrams; interviews; scientific dissemination notes; encyclopedia entries.

SOURCE: Adapted from the information contained in the Didactic Sequences available on the IQE Caruaru platform only for teachers.

Didactic sequences also mention the skills that will be developed in each of them (Chart 2), whose meanings of knowledge and learning referred to are related to a restricted concept of education that fits in a mere collection of competences and skills (FREITAS, 2018).

Another important element to be evidenced is that the didactic sequences, besides being productions that do not consider the specificities of each class and the students who form it, start from the perspective that it is necessary even to say to the professional how it should be developed, announcing the step by step of the activities, as shown in the text presented in the didactic sequence of the 2nd grade of Elementary School, corresponding to the artistic-literary field.

CHART 2 – Skills

Focus Skills	
2nd grade	- (EF02MA06) Recognize and elaborate addition and subtraction problems, involving numbers of up to three orders, with the meanings of joining, adding, separating, removing, using personal or conventional strategies.
3rd grade	- Recognize the meaning of half, third, fourth, fifth and tenth parts, associating them with the divisions without remainder. - (EF03MA09) Associate the quotient of a division with zero remainder of a natural number by 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10 to the ideas of half, fourth, fifth and tenth parts.

SOURCE: Adapted from the information contained in the Didactic Sequences available on the IQE Caruaru platform.

Starting Point: this didactic sequence has as its starting point a conversation wheel with the students about what they know about ditties and songs. Start with questions such as: Do you know what a ditty or song is? Which ones do you know? What do you think they are for (fun, playing, reading)? Would you like to sing? Allow students to freely expose their ideas and exchange information. At this point, surely, the knowledge of some will contribute to the advancement of all. Ask children to sing some songs that their families often sing in different situations: to sleep, at parties, to play, for example. Write down all names. (Teacher Didactic Sequence, 2022, p. 3).<sup>3</sup>

As we can understand, inscribed in curricular standardization processes, the IQE program assumed by the municipality of Caruaru produces senses of teaching linked to the technical perspectives, in which the teachers are perceived as people who have no decision power, nor is it up to them to have it, needing external intervention to organize their ways of acting in the teaching-learning processes. With this procedure of control of what should be taught in schools, there is an attempt to close the production of senses of curricular practices that meet the local contexts and the characteristics of the students with whom each teacher works. The conception that seems to guide this line of action is that contextual factors are limiting learning, and for this reason teachers do not need to be agents of the curricular decision, restricting themselves to teaching professional development conditions.

### Final considerations

Having as a locus of research the municipality of Caruaru, state of Pernambuco,

<sup>3</sup> Material made available on the IQE Caruaru Platform only for teachers.

Brazil, and the curricular policies/practices of Basic Education that are involved, the analysis carried out in this paper allows us to conclude that they were built from discourses of global educational reforms and national policies that, through the curricular standardization, have been trying to make it impossible to produce curricular responses based on local contexts. From this perspective, the curriculum is scaled only as a result of policies, disregarding the teacher as a curricular producer. At the same time, by valuing only the knowledge related to the areas of Portuguese and Mathematics and the formatted evaluations, policies/programs induce that formation and school education are constituted as preparation for these external or final tests. This is the neoliberal logic of accountability that restricts teachers to executors from what is prescribed and on the basis of which they should organize and control the teaching-learning processes.

Following this guidance, the municipality has been promoting a teaching and mechanized teaching professional development, contrary to the processes aligned with the construction of a contextual and interactive autonomy that allows teachers to reconfigure the senses of their professional action. In this strategy, the possibilities of the teachers are weakened to question the multiplication of supervision and evaluation devices that reduce self-control over the practices they realize and their profession (NÓVOA, 2002).

Understanding that the exercise of the teachers, their agency power, requires, in addition to individual efforts, the availability of resources and favorable contextual factors, we recognize that the constitutive exterior, when denying these conditions, creates difficulties for professional development processes oriented to the curricular decision power. However, recognizing that schools are intelligent institutions, consisting of professionals capable of diagnosing what is appropriate to each context, we believe that the impossibilities that are being created live together with possibilities built by their own teachers. In this position, we subscribe to the understanding that the senses can always be others, and that, even in the face of contextual limitations, teachers will act on the breaches of the structure and the system to dispute with policies other meanings of teaching enactment that stimulate professional development based on autonomy and supported by the consideration of the teaching knowledge they have. Nonetheless, as these disputes happen in the production of curricular practices/policies, we will engage in another study that will complement this one.

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