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Street-level Bureaucracy in Teacher Discretionary Power

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ABSTRACT – Street-level Bureaucracy in Teacher Discretionary Power. This study aims to analyze teacher's performance as a street-level bureaucrat and the role of teachers' discretionary power in schools. The article presents result of a survey carried out in 2019, in a public school in São Gonçalo/RJ. Its theoretical contribution seeks a dialogue with assumptions of Lipsky's Street-Level Bureaucracy theory (1980), in order to understand politics in its last phase of execution and the action of the subjects. The results showed an important teacher's discretionary power as a factor in the reconfiguration of the school's public policies, especially in relation to its interaction with the other actors involved in the implementation process. **Keywords: Teacher/Bureaucrat. Street-level Bureaucracy. Discretionary power.**

RESUMO – A Burocracia de Nível de Rua na Discricionariedade Docente. O estudo objetiva analisar a atuação do professor como burocrata de nível de rua e o papel da discricionariedade docente na escola. O artigo apresenta resultados de uma pesquisa realizada em 2019, em uma escola pública de São Gonçalo/RJ. Seu aporte teórico dialoga com pressupostos da teoria *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, de Lipsky (1980) para compreender a implementação da política e a ação dos sujeitos. Os resultados evidenciaram uma importante discricionariedade do professor como fator de reconfiguração das políticas públicas da escola, principalmente em relação a sua interação com os demais atores do processo de implementação. **Palavras-chave: Professor/Burocrata. Burocracia de Nível de Rua. Discricionariedade.**

Introduction

Street-level bureaucracy is a topic whose debate has been intensifying in specialized Brazilian literature. Fostered by the publication of Lipsky's work (1980), called *Street-Level Bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public service*, the discussion about bureaucratic discretionary power in the implementation of public policies increased the investigative interest on its actors, their intentions, their values and their influence on the results of the implemented policies.

The main researcher on the subject in our country, Lotta (2015, p. 6), considers that the debate on the implementation phase of public policies, "[...] has grown in recent years in Brazil, but this still represents the phase of policy production least explored by the national literature". According to the author, there are gaps in studies of the implementation process, as there is a need to focus on the influences by which it is subjected, in addition to considering its surroundings.

In Brazilian schools, we see teachers as professionals who work at the end of the educational policy process, establishing themselves at the end of the operational chain and expressing their actions to other actors, which are students, policy addressees, their families and other school actors. In this context, we reflect on the implementation of policies at school, from the perspective of street-level bureaucracy and the consequences of the teacher/bureaucrat's margin of freedom in the educational process. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the teacher's action as a street-level bureaucrat and the role of teacher discretionary power in the Elementary and Middle School.

Our theoretical-methodological references are based on Lipsky's theory (1980), called Street-Level Bureaucracy, which we use, in a dialogue with other authors, to think about the teacher's discretionary power in the implementation of public policies at school and the exercise of its discretionary act. It is a study that uses the methodological approach in which characteristics of interpretive research predominate, embodied in the guidelines of Content Analysis.

The text is structured in three parts, in addition to this introduction and final remarks. First, we discussed street-level bureaucracy in public policy implementation. The discussion then focuses on the discretionary context of the street-level teacher/bureaucrat. The last part of the text brings the analyzes and discussions of the interviews carried out in 2019, with three teachers from the first segment of Elementary Education at a municipal public school in São Gonçalo - a city in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

The interviews were carried out at the school, after approval by the Ethics Committee. The subsequent step was to go through the steps proposed by Bardin (2009) that were closest to our investigative interest, namely pre-analysis, categorization and data analysis.

We interviewed five teachers from the first segment of Elementary Education at a municipal public school in São Gonçalo/RJ. However, we

bring only three of these interviews due to the relevance of the contents discussed in relation to the research topic. The first teacher, to whom we will refer as A, has been regent for 17 years and has been working in the first stage of the first cycle of Elementary Education (first year of schooling, in Brazil) for 9 years. The second teacher, called teacher B, has been working with the third stage of the first cycle of Elementary Education (third year of schooling) for 3 years and has been regent for 5 years. The last teacher, whom we will call C, has been regent for 20 years and works in the second stage of the second cycle of Elementary Education (fifth year of schooling).

Data processing was carried out through Content Analysis and sought to establish the contours of teaching discretionary context. In this sense, a qualitative analysis was carried out, based on semi-structured interviews. Content Analysis is a systematic research technique that provides a method for the qualitative and quantitative analysis of a corpus of information, usually text. It involves a systemic analysis of the text, including images and symbolic matter, which makes valid assessments of the material examined replicable (Bardin, 2009).

Since we followed the concepts of Bardin (2009) as a possibility of analyzing the data produced, we carried out its pre-analysis, considering the following aspects for the treatment of the interviews:

1. Homogeneity: all the interviews were carried out with teachers from the first years of Elementary School and deal with discretionary acts present in teaching.
2. Representativeness: we brought dialogues that indicate the role of teachers in their decision-making space in pedagogical practice.
3. Completeness: the dialogues represent all the relevant considerations, judgments, perceptions presented by the teachers in relation to the factors related to their discretionary acts.
4. Relevance: the dialogues presented meet the objective of the research, in order to substantiate the theoretical discussions presented in this study.

Soon after, we tried to group data in consideration of their common elements, which could be classified by similarity or analogy. It is necessary, as stated by Bardin (2009), that criteria be followed for the categorization of data. Our option was for semantic categorization, from which thematic subcategories emerged.

Table 1 – Category and Subcategories

Category	Subcategories
Discretionary acting	- Teaching Methodologies - Curricular Contents
	- Interpersonal Relations - Human Dimension
	- Pressures from Higher Bureaucratic Agents - Responses to Students and their Parents/Guardians
	- Work Conditions

Source: Author's elaboration/Research Data.

In the next section, we bring a debate about the stage of implementation of public policies, when the street-level bureaucracy is evident, representing the materialization of the State to the citizens for whom policies are idealized, formulated and implemented.

Street-Level Bureaucracy in Policy Implementation

The literature on the subject of public policy implementation has been following, in recent decades, the debate on the control of street-level bureaucracies and the factors that influence the behavior of implementing agents who are the frontline workers in the provision of public services. These studies consider organizational political arrangements, administrative emphasis on policy goals, improving implementation team capacity, and managerial oversight (Hill, 1993). In general, they reinforce the consensus that implementation has been understood as the translation of goals developed at the highest level, transposing itself to the action of street-level bureaucrats, always crossed by layers of disjunctive influences that encompass social position, subjective perceptions, values and others. However, there are still issues to be discussed, mainly about understanding the importance of policy and managerial influences in the implementation process equation, as we understand that such influences are often silenced.

However, we recognize that there are factors that directly and indirectly influence frontline workers' perceptions of specific cases, and this recognition can direct us to a more nuanced understanding of implementation, indicating that the actions of street-level bureaucrats diverge from stated policies, moving away from high-level goals. From then on, it is important to reflect on the extent and sources of this divergence.

These problems related to the stage of implementation of public policies are issues that are recurrently debated in Brazil, although they still require attention to become a topic on the national political agenda, as this stage is linked to the need to develop improvements in political-administrative processes. This stage, in which the policy is implemented, is directly linked to the agenda-setting, policy-making and decision-making processes, which actually structure the model and scope of implemented policies.

The stage of public policy implementation is not isolated within the process and is intrinsically related to the other stages, presenting itself as the translation of the other stages, therefore, imprecise identifications, wrong agenda, poorly delineated formulations, wrong decisions will imply the implementation of a policy that will not respond adequately to the demands expressed in the social reality.

The concept of street-level bureaucracy developed by Lipsky (1980) results from the perception that, on the front line of political action, in direct contact with its users, agents use procedures that differ from the guidelines outlined by public policy makers. Thus, street-level

bureaucrats, in interacting with citizens, restructure the policy, making adaptations and adjustments that they deem necessary. For the author, discretionary power is necessary when the policies formulated do not present precise guidelines, leaving gaps for other interpretations, sometimes contradictory, and in situations in which the scarcity of resources requires the discretionary action of these agents.

Lipsky's studies (1980) are interested in the moment in which the face of the state is exposed to the citizen, through the provision of the service resulting from public policy, since, from then on, it is possible to perceive the failures and successes of the implementation process, developing theoretical models of analysis, which guide empirical research, with an emphasis on the influence of frontline workers in policy implementation.

Lipsky (1980) characterizes these professionals as public service agents who interact with policy recipients, having great influence on their results, due to a substantial degree of discretion, because the demand for their services leads them to reinvent routines and create what the author calls *coping mechanisms* for implementation incursions.

With regard to discretionary context, Lotta and Santiago (2017) clarify that the "[...] discretionary act is one that provides for some degree of arbitrariness on the part of the bureaucrat even within the legal limits of his performance". It is, therefore, its space of action, in which it uses its values and interests, by putting the policy on the scene, re-designing it and influencing its outcome. It is the freedom, restricted to legal limits, which the policy agent delivers to receivers. In Hupe's perspective (2013, p. 433), "[...] discretionary acting is freedom within constraints".

In view of this, we understand that it happens in a margin granted by legislation or when it is not outlined enough and opens spaces for bureaucrats to act, in accordance with their perceptions and convictions. In the bureaucratic process, discretionary act refers to the judgment that bureaucrats make, when interpreting norms and rules imposed by politics, according to the margin of independence they have to make decisions. Sometimes, this judgment is crossed by a certain degree of arbitrariness or individuality, which can lead to a very peculiar understanding of politics (Lotta; Santiago, 2017).

In view of these discussions, we understand that the policy is re-written by public service agents, because, through discretionary power, they dispose of it, redefining it. And this is one of the reasons for considering them subjects that occupy decision space and power in the delivery of policy to its addressee.

However, Hupe and Hill (2007) point out that the existence of explanatory guidelines does not prevent the exercise of discretionary acting, since the implementation of public policies is imbricated with complexities, necessarily presupposing interpretation so that the political design becomes evident.

In street-level bureaucracy, bureaucrats are responsible for implementing the policy and translating it, evidencing the configuration of a government policy, not necessarily as a result of intentionality. In this regard, Pires and Lotta note that (2019, p. 132) “[...] the prevailing literature on street-level bureaucracy has treated this issue as a potential (often unintentional) outcome”, because, although public policy is formulated with intentionality, the results of its implementation may not be as expected.

In their role, in the routine of policy development, street-level bureaucrats are compelled to act in contexts that are not always objectively delineated. They act at the end of the process, fulfilling the last stage of the policy development, starting from its strategic planning. However, these agents are not mere executors/task workers in charge of implementing the established. Street-level bureaucrats rewrite politics because, when dealing with it in its final process, they reframe it, according to their subjectivity. They are the bureaucrats who, in their routine work, establish criteria in the gaps left by policy directives (Lipsky, 1980).

Lipsky (1980) argues that the reformulation of policies by street-level bureaucrats occurs through the implementation of the policy in its bottom-up perspective, whose implementation model is more organic, since, by providing opportunities for actions from the bottom up, it inserts the subjects involved in the implementation as necessary participants in the process, shifting decision-making power from the top of the pyramid to the street level. For the author, these subjects are bureaucrats who have significant knowledge of the scenarios and specificities of the object to which the policies are directed, crediting them with mastery and knowledge of the most appropriate strategies for successful implementation. However, despite such dominance, street-level bureaucrats find, in their daily work, eventualities with which they have to deal, using their creativity, their experience, their values in actions, whose subjectivity is the main aspect of the discretionary act.

According to the author, the action of street-level bureaucrats influences the opportunities and citizens’ access to the benefits of the implemented policy. This is because these bureaucrats are responsible for interpreting the rules and allocating the scarce resources made available by public policies (Lipsky, 1980).

The author considers the work environment essential for the discretionary act, because, as a result of the scarcity of resources, the street-level bureaucrat needs to deliberate on their use, regardless of the quantities and quality. In these circumstances, discretionary acting is not an agent’s choice, nor is it a given space of autonomy, but it is a result of the necessary action so that insufficient resources can be allocated, in order to minimize the losses of their exiguity as much as possible.

The decisions of these bureaucrats are related to the social context of their performance, therefore, the recipients of certain public policies are understood as clients. This understanding comes from

the daily processes in which they deal with the target audience of the policies in a homogenizing way, to establish a certain regularity in the provision of services. However, such homogenization is not always conclusive. Although street-level bureaucrats organize their audiences into stereotypical characterizations, this audience is prone to expressing their issues, problems, and personal needs to agents, establishing an individualized relationship that results in inequality and conflicts in the distribution of policy benefits among citizens.

A street-level bureaucrat's attitude and general approach towards his client can significantly affect the client. These considerations are broader than initially thought. The potential impact of his decisions on the citizens he deals with is quite extensive (Lipsky, 1980, p. 2).

In this process of interaction between bureaucrats and citizens, a relational cycle is established, in which the citizen's reaction to the bureaucrat's actions interferes in the way this agent will conduct the processes, in order to provide or not the access to the services immanent of the policies. It is, therefore, a scheme of mutual expectations, demarcated by an inequality of power, given that the bureaucrats have the legitimacy of the State.

At school, street-level bureaucracy has been translated by education professionals into the routine of educational processes. One of these professionals is the teacher, whose discretionary acting has a significant influence on everyday school life. This is the topic of the next section.

The Teacher/Street Level Bureaucrat

Teachers may fall into the category typified by Lipsky (1980) as street-level bureaucrats. This possibility is related to the characteristics of this public agent described by the author. First, we can say that the teacher establishes direct contact with his audience - the student - who is the receiver of the public service and second, because he has, in the routine of his work, a high discretionary power. Furthermore, a series of characteristics related to this employee dialogue with the ambiguities of the public sector and the controversies about the efficiency of the services provided. Muylaert (2019, p. 7) clarifies that:

[...] Teachers are the main implementing agents of formulated policies, as they are the end of the implementation chain. They are the ones who are in direct contact with the students – beneficiaries of the service. It is the teacher, within the classroom, who creates the didactic-pedagogical opportunities for learning to take place. In other words: it is the teacher who mediates the students' learning process. In this sense, the teacher is defined as the BNR, as he is the agent responsible for guaranteeing learning.

Therefore, teachers have a strategic and unique role in the implementation of public policy, because they reveal themselves as catalysts, interpreters and implementers of policy. They are the professionals who, at the end of the process, the classroom, deal with demands, tensions and the task of responding not only to their target audience, but to the hierarchically superior bureaucrats, who await the success of the educational work.

However, their working conditions and the contexts in which they teach are factors that influence their decisions as street-level bureaucrats. Many social problems have been delegated to the school and, in the instance of action, to the teachers: violence, exclusion, vulnerabilities, inequalities are some of the countless adversities that strain the work of these professionals.

They are entangled in an asymmetrical and complex power of relationships, as they are subjugated to hierarchical power in the bureaucratic chain of command and, at the same time, are at the forefront of public school systems, in addition to acting at the end of the formal political-administrative hierarchy, in charge of implementing educational policy.

In the complexity of policy implementation, teachers must position themselves in relation to other actors in the process and consider their educational demands. They must contemplate the collectivity of their students without disregarding the subjectivities of each one of them. In this intricate process, the teacher uses his decision space to try to solve this tension. However, this process is crossed by the interaction between teacher/student, which is almost always personal, because teachers, in the classroom, live with the drama of the lives of their students and even their families.

Therefore, the complexity of the bureaucratic teacher's work requires recurrent human interactions that make it difficult to reduce the discretion exercised by him, since it is not possible to conduct pedagogical work only through curricula, planning and organizational guidelines. The human dimension will almost always permeate the work of this professional.

Teachers in the early years of Elementary School, for example, establish an important time of coexistence with their students and it is almost inevitable to know their individualities, living conditions, family and social relationships, causing narrowing and connections and directly influencing the discretionary act in the classroom, which causes an overflow (Nóvoa, 2007) of teaching functions. The action of this professional is established in a conflicting and ambiguous environment, in which his space of discretionary power derives from the relationships with his students and with the other bureaucrats of the school. In this way, the judgment made by the teacher regarding his students places them in categories of deserving or not deserving of greater attention, proximity, guidance, intellectual investment. Oliveira (2017, p. 174) explains that such moral judgment seeks to "[...] penalize those considered undeserving, or offer them less than pragmatic efforts would al-

low”, because “in the school organization, agents can become rigid and intransigent if they perceive that students are trying to manipulate the system” (Oliveira, 2017, p. 175-176). However, judgments like these can mean the worsening of the imbalance in educational opportunities and the ratification of a meritocratic logic to value students and designate them as worthy or unworthy of intellectual investment.

In fact, the categorization of individuals can lead to the reproduction of educational inequalities. That is, the effects of such categorization imply the inclusion or exclusion of individuals from the benefits of public policy (Pires; Lotta; Torres Junior, 2018). According to Lipsky (1980), individuals are classified into social categories, in view of the demands presented by them. The author, when reflecting on the relationships between implementing agents and citizens, declares that people:

[...] come to street-level bureaucracies as unique individuals, with different life experiences, personalities, and in their life circumstances. In their encounters with bureaucracies, they are transformed into clients, fitted into a very small number of categories, treated and treated as if they fit within standardized definitions of units designed for specific bureaucratic niches (Lipsky, 1980, p. 135).

Thus, the students’ individualities, in the process of interaction with the teachers/bureaucrats, who represent, in this movement, the face of the State, give way to their identification as a social category, because the public service agent recognizes them within pre-established social standards.

Faced with this categorization, street-level bureaucrats distribute the benefits of the policy, choosing how and to whom they should direct such benefits. In a second move, they determine the contexts and intensity of interactions with policy receivers. Pires, Lotta and Torres Junior (2018) identify these movements as distributive effects of discretionary acting.

Similarly, the teaching discretionary act recognizes its student and, at the forefront of educational policy, expresses its decision-making power, considering it in terms of moral categorizations, valuing or ignoring him, as a citizen with rights, in relation to which the teacher/bureaucrat decides or not to act.

Furthermore, schools accept as *clients* all those who have the right to be in them. That is, neither the organization nor the student exercises choice regarding participation in this relationship. Its mandatory nature suggests that schools are dealing with an audience whose motivations and desires are unknown. Therefore, the teacher needs to trust his own ability to establish a productive interaction with the students. He, daily, must resolve the conflict between the personal and affective demands of the teacher/student relationship in the educational act, in addition to equating the organizational demands for control and order, which are required of them in the rational bureaucratic processes, present in the school environment.

Another example of the complexity of the teacher's discretionary power is in their possibilities of adapting or even supplanting abstract curricula in their daily practice, as they believe to be the most appropriate for their students. Thus, he becomes a curriculum designer and not a mere implementer, as Lipsky (1980) warns us, and such discretionary power significantly alters the original policy.

The teacher, especially the one who teaches in classes in the early years of Elementary School, the focus of this research, acts as an intermediary for all activities related to their students at school, influencing the type of school experience of their target audience. In this context, the central dilemma of street-level bureaucratic teachers is in the performance of comprehensive and ambiguous roles, which is due to the conflicting nature of their work. And, whether or not the discretionary acting they have will contribute to the democratization of educational opportunities will depend not only on the value judgments made about their students, but on a series of adequate working conditions that, today, in Brazilian public schools, are not fully available to them.

Given the above, we understand teaching discretionary power as a space for decision and power resulting from the accumulation of a large volume of demands, insufficient resources, oppression by the gears of the bureaucratic system, imprecision of guidelines, accountability for results, etc. Their actions are characterized by the value judgments they issue, denoting even more subjective characteristics to discretionary acting, in which the appreciation of the policy configuration is personal, resulting in contradictory behavior and decision-making. Mota believes that teachers:

[...] are the agents who are most exposed to the undesirable effects of the policy, as they are the most directly affected by the demand for results. Located at the lowest level of the bureaucratic hierarchy, they receive demands from students, parents, the management team (Mota, 2018, p. 699).

In this way, the teacher/bureaucrat's discretionary acting is also conditioned to factors that go beyond the classroom space, although it influences the action performed in it. Demands for results, the relationship of domination imposed by the higher hierarchical instance, the organization of school daily life, the relationship with other school bureaucrats, the interaction with the school community are aspects involved in the actions/choices that the teacher will make and translate into classroom. While he must continually act in a way that resonates with the expectations of parents, the school community, and other school bureaucrats, his discretionary space will always present itself.

In this follow-up, the teacher is the bureaucrat whose discretionary acting can be verified as a key element for the circulation of public policy in the school, therefore, the analysis of his performance will present us with elements that allow the understanding of the processes covered by the policy, its perspectives and results. This actor, essential

for the school, establishes his action and his power, decisively influencing the daily lives of his students. Next, we will analyze such actions in dialogue with the teachers of the researched school.

The Perceptions of Teachers Bureaucrats: the analysis of content in the teaching discretionary action

The school in which the research was carried out is located in a socially vulnerable neighborhood in the city of São Gonçalo and offers from Kindergarten to the ninth grade of schooling. As we have already clarified, our focus is the 1st Segment of Elementary Education, which encompasses the initial years of schooling. Although we interviewed five teachers, one from each year of schooling, in order to obtain a panoramic dimension of the segment, only three of these dialogues proved to be relevant to respond to the objective of this research, as guided by Bardin (2009) in relation to the criterion of relevance.

Therefore, we begin our analysis, reaffirming our option for Content Analysis (Bardin, 2009), in which the teacher's/street-level bureaucrat discretionary acting is our category of analysis. In relation to the subcategories, the fragment below dialogues with the direction of our gaze towards the Teaching Methodologies and Curricular Contents, as we can see in the highlight of the speech of teacher A:

We don't have a method, I mean *nothing fixed*, you know? We have a book that has a methodology, of course, but *I don't follow* exactly what's in there. I bring other things to my students to *enrich* the work. The book is more like support. I have to have flexibility in the content, because students do not always follow exactly what has to be given. I follow the material according to the answer that the students give. I cannot be rigid with the content (emphasis added).

Regarding the position of teacher A, from the perspective of her teaching methodology and monitoring of the curricular direction, her speech reveals that her discretionary acting is in line with her judgment of what contents are or are not suitable for her students. In her quest to *enrich* her work, she dispenses with the systematic use of textbooks and traces her own curricular path, showing herself as a bureaucrat who not only retranslates policy, but also idealizes it. Her discretionary space can be characterized as expanded and is due to the demand of her students, as her actions come from the response given by them. The teacher's discretionary acting operates as an *adaptation mechanism* (Lima; D'Ascenzi, 2013) and also as a formulation. Adaptation/formulation is triggered in order to meet the demands and needs presented by the client, reconfiguring and even elaborating another policy design.

Focusing on our analysis subcategories Social Categorization and Human Dimension, Professor B brings propositions for our reflection. It is important to highlight that she is the most inexperienced of the interviewees and works with a 3rd year class, in which there is a significant percentage of students who repeat a grade - about 40%, according to

the school's Final Results Minutes. The teacher explains that "as I am the youngest at school, I am the last to choose the class and I always get the most difficult class". Regarding her relationship with her class, her report is as follows:

My class is very heterogeneous. I have to do different activities for the groups. There are those who *already know how to read*, others *in the process*, others who *don't know anything*, but are *interested* and others *without any interest*. It's hard to figure it out. Some need *more attention* and others can walk with more autonomy. My main concern is for those who *don't have support at home*. I have to make a huge effort to handle these. Unfortunately, there is very little participation and support from the family and these are the students who need me the most (emphasis added).

From the content highlighted in teacher B's speech, we observed that she uses an explicit classification to list her students in pre-established drawers (those who know, those who don't know, those interested, the disinterested, those who don't have support). These are the social categories described by Lipsky (1980), establishing standards used by street-level bureaucrats to distribute public policy benefits or sanctions. The teacher, when establishing the categorization of his students, transforming them into "identifiable and allocable clients" (Lipsky, 1980, p. 16), directs the policy in order to consolidate such classification. As already discussed by us, this behavior of the bureaucrat can corroborate processes of inequalities already triggered in our schools.

In addition, teacher B chooses a category with which she should be *more concerned*, demanding her greater attention, called by her as *those who do not have support at home*, and in this way, the teacher highlights one more of our subcategorizations: the human dimension. In this case, we observed that teacher B's discretionary acting is guided by the subjectivity of her values, her social position and her professional and life trajectory. By listing those to whom she should be more attentive, she defines those deserving of the benefits of politics, to the detriment of others who, in the teacher's cleavage, do not fit such merit.

Teacher B also tells us that she has lived in the community where the school is located for 2 years. She tells us that she is a neighbor of some students and it is not uncommon, on the way to work, for them to be accompanied. The return also happens this way. This close relationship with part of its students/clients makes its discretionary power even more forceful. She informs us that:

When a student misses class, I knock on the door to find out why. If you're sick, I take the activities to their house. It's only bad when some parents want to talk about their children on the street, before or after work hours. They end up invading my personal space a little bit. Things get a little mixed up.

We found that some teachers establish more personal relationships with students, as is the case with teacher B, since her interaction with the student is established in a wide-ranging space of relationships. This interaction of the teacher with his student and his family involves

individual and reciprocal actions, in which the complex decision-making process is influenced. Therefore, the teacher, when establishing individualized actions, from the dialogues with other subjects of the implementation process, interferes in the result of the public policy, showing that, in their routine, their interests and the contours of their interactions can overlap and change the implementation results. Teacher B is positioned in an arena of interaction that goes beyond the scope of her professional action, reinforcing her discretionary acting in the human dimension.

To discuss the subcategories Pressures from Superior Bureaucratic Agents and Responses to Students and their Guardians, we brought the words of teacher C. She tells us her position in relation to the other school bureaucrats and their performance:

It's not a secret either to the school administration or to anyone. I've always said that I don't feel coordinated. I coordinate. I am my time manager. In my own way. Is there a project to do? I do or I don't if I think it's important. I'm in charge in my classroom, because I'm the one who, in the end, has to take care of my students' learning. I'm the one who's with them every day. I know what's best for them. That's why I do what I know is most likely to work.

Indeed, at the end of the policy execution process, the decision and the power are under the responsibility of the teacher. Teacher C typifies the bureaucrat who opposes superior commands, revealing the fragility of professional and hierarchical relationships designed in the school. A vertical relationship can be a potentiator of resistance actions and opposition to the determinations of agents fixed in the highest place of the bureaucracy established in the school. In the context of this verticalization, the possibilities of discussion about the organization of work and its integration are reduced, not only with the school project, but with the lives of those who transit through it.

Teacher C's discretionary acting is also present in an attempt to provide answers to regulatory bodies, after all, "I have to take care of my students' learning". The accountability attributed to the teacher regarding student performance causes the reconfiguration of the contours of the policy, evidencing a discretionary context loaded with external influences, as street-level bureaucrats exercise discretionary acting linked to the coercion of the chain of subjects who expect the result of the policy. This alleged autonomy claimed by teacher C, in fact, fragments the possibilities of thinking about the school's collectivity and causes a *pedagogical insulation*, restricted to its own purposes.

To approach our last subcategory, Working Conditions, we return to our dialogue with teacher A, from which we bring the following fragment:

I do the best I can within the conditions that the school offers. The other day I ordered two packages of colorset, but I only had one and I still had to share it with my colleague. We don't have materials and then we improvise. For example, it is not possible to give a box of colored pencils to each student, so I make small packages with a smaller amount and give

them to everyone. We also rotate the textbook, because it's not enough for everyone. The toys, I ask for donations and I also bring them from home.

In teacher A's arguments, her unfavorable working conditions stand out. In the routine of her tasks, she needs to make decisions about the allocation of scarce resources, in an attempt to serve students with a minimum of quality necessary to carry out the educational work. In this way, teachers/bureaucrats create strategies to respond to the limitations imposed by precariousness, in order to offer each of the receivers of the policy fractions of benefits that should be available in their entirety. Discretionary acting is based on the discernment of the best solution for the situation presented and on the constraints caused by the limitation of the resources offered. For us, in this case, discretionary acting is not the power to choose: it is having no choice but to decide on the least harmful way to dispose of insufficient inputs among policy users.

Final Considerations

This study sought to analyze the role of the teacher as a street-level bureaucrat and the role of teacher discretionary acts in a municipal public school in São Gonçalo/RJ. In the discussions outlined, we could see that the street-level bureaucracy, represented by the teachers, takes responsibility for filling the gaps and operationalizing the policy, directing it under criteria constructed from subjective interpretations, based on values, perceptions and judgments established in interactions with other actors in the process, which may reflect and reinforce exclusionary ideologies, prevalent in society.

It is a process in which the resignification of the proposed public policies, inherent to the implementation process, translates into dynamics permeated by the interactional relationships between teachers and their students, other school bureaucrats, the school community and the tensions experienced by having to present answers and results to higher levels in the organizational hierarchy. In this movement, actors intertwine in the search for a space of power for the operationalization of policies, influencing their results.

The teacher, as a street-level bureaucrat, operationalizes his educational project from scenarios that are often deprived of resources and, for that, mobilizes strategies to minimize the effects of incompleteness revealed at the time of implementation. Therefore, this freedom happens not only due to the autonomy delegated to the teacher, but also due to the need to enable, in the routine of their work, conditions for the implementation of the policy.

Finally, we conclude that looking at the timing of policy implementation through the lens of street-level bureaucracy, especially through empirical studies, can contribute to the identification of factors that favor or reduce the chances of success of public policy and its effects on citizens' lives.

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