

## School and Life Project Construction: concept and practice in high schools in the state of São Paulo/Brazil

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### Abstract.

The contribution of the school institution to the construction of the life project for young people and adolescents has gained visibility in the last two decades in Brazil being the object of policies and consequent legislation on the subject. What this paper stands out is that there are different approaches with respect to the meaning given to the theme "life project", which can refer both to issues of personal life and identity construction, as well as to issues specifically focused on professional insertion. Thus, the school is presented as the space that should include as its task the construction of the students' life project, promoting a space for reflection and projection about the future. The future, however, as different authors point out (Lecardi, 2014, 2005; Castel, 1997; Sennett, 2002), is full of uncertainties, especially when we refer to the issue of training for work. From these reflections, this paper aims to discuss the life project module as one of the curricular components of high school in Brazil. The research methodology was the documental analysis of the legislation that establishes this educational policy, in the state of São Paulo, from a critical perspective. As a conclusion, the concept of life project adopted, will be highlighted the positive aspects, related to the benefits that the introduction of this module can represent, as well as the negative aspects by linking only this module to the professional insertion, in a phase of identity construction of the students.

**Keywords:** educational police; identity; professional insertion; school and the future.

### 1. Introduction

The contribution of the school institution to the construction of the life project of young people and adolescents has gained visibility in recent decades in Brazil, being the object of policies and consequent legislation on the subject. This article discusses the issue of preparing the life project of high school students in public schools in Brazil, a stage of education that presents numerous problems such as, for example, large dropouts and dropouts. In addition to these aspects, the various controversies related to technical training versus general training stand out, which accompanied the different reformulations that this modality of education underwent.

The issue of preparing the life project of young people and adolescents has been part of educational concerns, especially in terms of promoting a reflection on the future scenarios they will encounter, not only in the professional sphere, but also in the social sphere. Some authors (Araujo, 2009; Carrano et al, 2015; Sposito and Souza, 2015) have emphasized the aspect that policies aimed at professional insertion have an appeal for lighter training and

focus on preventing the involvement of young people with social violence and crime, but they do not propose coordinated action with schools on the future of these young people. In this context, Brazilian public schools had little systematic and planned exploration of their contribution to the elaboration of the students' life project until at least the last 15 years, when programs began to appear that include this theme in the curriculum in a more structured way. What can be highlighted in the discussion on this theme is that there are different approaches regarding the meaning given to the term "life project", which can refer both to issues of personal life, adult life, marriage, children, relationships, as well as to guidelines specifically aimed at professional insertion. In educational policies where the theme "life project" is present, the school is considered the space that will have the task of preparing the life project, becoming a space for reflection on the future by the students. The future, however, as different authors point out (Lecardi 2014, 2005, Castel, 1997; Sennett, 2002), is full of uncertainties, especially when we refer to the issue of training for work.

Based on these reflections, it is considered important to define the meaning of the term life project, as there are different approaches to the term, both in theoretical articles and in the practice of programs and proposals for this component in the curriculum structure of public schools. Therefore, firstly, this paper presents an analysis of the main conceptions present in scientific articles, which define the concept of life project, and secondly it will present an analysis of the proposal of the life project curriculum component present in the Full Time Teaching Program - PEI, for high schools in the state and São Paulo, Brazil.

Ribeiro (2010) highlights the different conceptions of the term life project and citing Barbier (1996) makes a distinction between two inseparable and equally important dimensions, in terms of instrumentation for the relationship and construction in the world: the life project itself, which is more directly related to the construction of identity and life goals and expectations (subjective instrumentation); and the action plan, which represents a set of actions to achieve an end (objective instrumentation). Both dimensions are marked by the possibilities and restrictions of the sociocultural group of origin. (BARBIER, 1996, apud RIBEIRO, 2010, page 121)

In addition to choosing a profession or occupation, or even obtaining a diploma, Dubar (2000) emphasizes the need for a personal construction, an identity strategy that brings into play the image of the self, its capabilities and the achievement of your desires, always considering the lived reality. Santos (2002) considers that the life project of young people is linked to a series of variables and may suffer influences and incorporated symbolic impositions, from the family, from the social group to which this young person belongs and from the ideology of the ruling class. These variables intersect at three different levels: historical, psychological and sociological.

The historical level refers to the subject's personal history, which makes us glimpse the reasons as a set of justifications engendered by history and by its different ways of structuring. The psychological level refers to the subject's momentary psychology and tries to articulate, within a certain coherence, the reasons that the subject can explain. This imperative puts pressure on the subject in his conscious entrenchments to help him establish, with sufficient clarity and certainty, the justifications he has for launching himself into a project. The sociological level would be linked to environmental factors, through modes or cultural models that are expressed or contested, according to the position occupied by the subject (SANTOS, 2002, p.18).

As stated by Santos (2002), the symbolic elements that can guide young people's choices are diffused in social daily life and spread in culture, institutions, social practices, interpersonal and mass communications, and the media.

Thus, the issue of building the life project of young people and adolescents is permeated by a complexity that involves social, historical, psychological and economic aspects that need to be understood so that actions that are more effective can collaborate in this process.

In an article that discusses the elaboration of the life project of young university students, Maia & Mancebo (2010, p. 382), based on the reflections of Velho (1999), state that individual projects are developed around the notion of time with separate stages, chaining the moment when plans are made. They emphasize that the life project, in Western society, is closely related to the notion of the individual and related to two aspects that are debatable, one of them being the idea that individuals choose the life project and the other that each one is a bearer of a set of peculiar potentialities, which constitutes its own brand, and of which its history (biography) is a more or less successful performance of these. They problematize these two aspects in the sense that this elaboration of the life project is related to sociocultural experiences, experiences and interactions that relativize the idea of natural linkage and a project that depends only on individuals and not on concrete living conditions.

In addition to these aspects, Démazier & Dubar (2006) relate the discussion of the life project to the issue of identity constructed over the experiences and the construction of time, articulating two dimensions that would be the biographical and the relational. The first dimension refers to the construction over time, by individuals, of social and professional identities based on the categories offered by successive institutions: family, school, labor market, company. The second dimension concerns the recognition, at a given time and within a given space, of legitimizing the identities associated with the knowledge, skills and images of themselves proposed and expressed by individuals in action systems.

In the line of reasoning about identity and life project, we have Honneth's (2003) reflections on the meaning of recognition that allows the life project to materialize autonomously, independent of external impositions and alien to the individual's real expectations. According to Dantas (2017, p.08), Honneth (2003) defines that recognition is worked in three spheres: (a) in the emotional sphere, in the relationships of love and friendship, which allows the individual to trust himself to achieve his personal self-fulfillment; (b) in the legal-moral sphere, based on law, in which the person is recognized as legally autonomous; and (c) in the sphere of social esteem, in which solidary respect occurs in a community of values. The non-recognition of the three aforementioned spheres compromises the autonomous construction of identity and, consequently, the life project needs to be well structured so that it is the result of an autonomous identity, free from conformity with the alienating logics of the market.

Another author who focused on the theme of the life project and discussed the concept of time and the concept of the future in this process is Carmen Leccardi (2005, 2014).

In using the expression “speed of the rhythms of life” we refer to the results at the level of actions of the contraction in temporal horizons and the dominion of the short term; to the out-and-out hegemony of the deadline, elaborated as a principle of action; to the discrediting of perspectives founded on the idea of “once and for all” (i.e. irreversibility); and to the spread of a culture of the provisory. Together, these factors impact negatively not only on the ways in

which we work, interact, and construct our actions in the present but also on our ways of looking at the future. (Lecardi, 2014, p. 42)

From the perspective of Machado (2006, p.5), a life project “always means the anticipation of an action, involving a reference to the future”. The elaboration of a project in the general sense, has its implications, characteristics and also proposals that are linked to the objectives that one wants to reach. A project is the act of idealizing the future, a human construction and needs the now to be thought out and planned. The project always means the possibility of transforming and creating the future, just as the future requires projects to make it happen. The value that the project acquires is expressed in the following statement “we constitute ourselves as people insofar as we carry out our projects” (MACHADO, 2006, p. 18).

Damon, Menon and Bronk (2003) report that people are led to adopt projects for their lives based on their experiences and experiences. The awakening to a vital project can happen through participation in the family, work, community, among others. Therefore, the goals that a subject adopts for his life and that are part of a project will be a guide for his existence, influenced by dynamics loaded with meanings for this subject.

Based on these reflections, this paper has as its main objective to discuss the results of a research on the life project module as one of the curricular components of High School in Brazil and the expected role of the school in this context. The research methodology was document analysis based on the Critical Discourse Analysis - ACD. ACD focuses on the ways in which discourse structures put into practice, confirm, legitimize, reproduce or challenge relations of power and domination in society. According to VanDjik (2005, p. 20), Fairclough and Wodak (1997:271-80) summarize the main postulates of the ACD as follows:

- ACD is dedicated to social problems;
- power relations are discursive;
- discourse constitutes society and culture;
- the discourse has an ideological functioning;
- the link between text and society is mediated;
- discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory;
- speech is a form of social action.

Thus, the analysis of documents, from the ACD, seeks to elucidate the plots present between the lines of the text, as well as the meanings given to the propositions that compose them, unveiling the ideological issues, power politics, as well as the historical, economic contexts and social in which they were elaborated.

### **An analysis of the Full Time Teaching Program-PEI/SP and the Life Project module**

The Full Time Education Program - PEI was established in 2012 through complementary law No. 1164 (SÃO PAULO, 2012a), of January 4, amended by complementary law No. 1191 (SÃO PAULO, 2012b), of December 28, 2012, as part and continuity of the Education Program – São Paulo Commitment, 2011, both from SEDUC-SP. The Program had a significant expansion, in the number of schools and years of teaching that became part of the program and according to the program's updated data, today there are 308 PEI schools, reaching 104 thousand students (SEDUC-SP, 2020).

This Program was started in 2012, in 16 high schools, and from 2013 expanded to 22 schools of elementary school Final Years and 29 schools of high school, and 2 schools of elementary and high school (SEDUC-SP, 2014a, p. 6-7).

The aforementioned Complementary Law 1191/2012 is present in article 2, item VI - the life project, which is defined as a document prepared by the student, which expresses goals and defines deadlines, with a view to achieving individual skills, with individual responsibility, responsibility social and institutional responsibility in relation to the State Full Time High School. The definition of the life project in this Complementary Law is very brief and does not clearly show which elements should be part of the life project, however, in later guidelines, the concept of life project established is very clear and will be analysed later on.

The design of the PEI in the state of São Paulo was inspired by the PEI of Pernambuco schools, established in 2008 with the participation of the Institute of Co-responsibility for Education (ICE), a non-profit entity created by a group of businessmen who put it as one of its main objectives is the search for restoring a standard of excellence in education. This entity, made up of personal, business, intelligence and educational consultants and managers, also provided the main technical support for the conception, development and implementation of the PEI in São Paulo. ICE partners are Instituto Natura; the Institute of Quality in Education; the Sonho Grande Institute, which is also a non-governmental organization.

ICE and its partners carry with them educational ideals linked to efficiency and quality measurable in scale, linked to performance in indicators focused on the subjects of Portuguese Language and Mathematics, as can be seen in the descriptions of their missions. According to them, such an approach would promote improvements in education, which would lead to a change in education in the country.

Turning to the analysis of the PEI proposal for schools in the state of São Paulo, in the Program Guidelines notebook, it is observed that the term "life project" is mentioned 33 times. With this objective in mind, the Full Time Teaching Program provides its students, in addition to the mandatory regular curriculum classes, opportunities to learn and develop practices to support them in being autonomous in the planning and execution of their Life Project.

Educators, in addition to traditional teaching activities, are also responsible for guiding students in their personal, academic and professional development and with full dedication to the school unit, inside and outside the classroom, educators are expected to take initiatives that operationalize their social, material and symbolic support for the preparation and implementation of the student's personal and professional project, actions that help him to overcome his difficulties and activities that energize him to pursue the path of his ideals and that he gradually defines in his Life Project . (Page 11)

The Life Project is simultaneously the focus on which all the actions of the school and the methodology that will support the student in its construction must converge. Youth Protagonism is, in turn, one of the educational principles that support the construction of the Life Project. (Page 13)

These statements are very significant because at different times in this document it is stated that the focus on which all school actions must converge is the life project, indicating the importance that is being given to students incorporating the need to project their future, as well as calls the school to consider this task as a priority. The autonomy sought, in turn, requires, however, an analysis not only of what the school and its teaching staff can offer, but the concrete conditions of life that allow this projection of the future to be carried out.

In sub-item 111. Class Leaders, the following statement is found:

The practices and experiences in Youth Protagonism consist of opportunities for learning fundamental management, co-management and hetero-management skills – of oneself, knowledge and one's life project. So that students can exercise them properly, to organize it institutionally, there is an indication of class leaders. (Page 15)

What interpretations can be given to the terms “management, co-management and hetero-management” used? These propositions lead us to interpret that just as Lecardi (2014), Dardot & Laval (2016) and others discuss, nothing is more debatable because, in fact, the school would be preparing the student to sell their skills to a volatile and “flexible”, knowledge presented as fundamental for managing oneself and one's life project, in a decontextualized way.

This perspective is present as principles of an idea, which, despite having the guise of improving the quality of education, takes off from the concrete conditions of a society in which the economy is not directed towards reducing inequalities, but towards the accumulation of wealth for a small portion of the population, and that is uninterested in income distribution, reduction of inequalities and an education really for autonomy.

Another aspect pointed out as important in the construction of the life project by the students is that when designing their future, students project their dreams and maintain the ability to dream, as illustrated below:

One of the main social functions of the school is to welcome young people who are entering it, giving them conditions to not only preserve past and present achievements, but mainly, starting from the existing one, to improve it. There is a necessary relationship between dreams and human achievements with the responsibility to avoid, with educational actions, that young people of an entire generation lose the ability to dream. (Page 16)

The reflection that arises is that to allow students to dream of the future they need to mirror themselves in society and find resonance in the perspective of a future that allows for some stability and hope that their efforts will in fact be rewarded and allow them to have living conditions, wages and social security, which the reality of our society does not seem to present. From this perspective, therefore, it is unlikely that this school has the capacity to make its students dream.

It is observed that in the PEI proposal there is often the presence of management tools to contribute to the development of life projects by the students, as can be seen in the following text of the proposal:

In order to ensure that the students correctly define the objectives, a considerable part of the guidelines for the Life Project is dedicated to building an articulated vision of themselves and the world, capable of supporting their existential and social choices. In addition to helping students choose their life project, the guidelines also aim to provide sufficient notions of project management so that they can properly organize their studies. (Page 19)

The question that arises is whether such tools are adequate to be directed towards reflections on dreams, existential and social choices, as expressed in the text, and whether teenagers and young people who attend high school are mature enough to work with such tools, envisioning their future. What can be concluded is that such tools will serve for students to provide bureaucratic answers that they will comply with, without actually helping to reflect on the life project and its contexts.

Analyzing the document of the PEI guidelines, with respect to the performance of professors and managers, we can highlight some foreseen aspects, such as the performance evaluation aiming to support the continuing education processes of professionals, which defines their permanence in the Program or not. It is important to note that public basic education schools in Brazil, especially those in the second cycle of elementary school and high school, have at least two shifts of 4 hours and the teachers invariably teach in two or three shifts, morning, afternoon and night, in different schools., while teachers in full-time schools only teach at one school and the salary is higher. So, remaining a full-time school teacher, despite the anticipated challenges, is a career advantage.

In addition to the tasks already established for the teacher, which, although they are already in their attributions as good educators, such as diagnostic assessments, gauging gaps in the student's education, others are present, such as the one highlighted below:

The educators who work at the Full Time Teaching Schools encourage each student to dream and make the necessary effort to make their dreams come true. There is a full awareness that, alongside this incentive, the school must offer support so that its students have real possibilities to achieve their wishes. (SE, 2014b, p.18)

Thus, issues that are already and should be part of the daily life of the educational process in schools seem to be reinvented as a novelty, but in a perspective whose main objective is to direct the student from the first year of high school to a professional choice, as the project of life in different moments of the proposal, although he talks about dreams, etc., the central focus is the life project linked to the labor market.

Although it is recognized the importance of considering education, envisioning a project for the student's future, it is considered that dreams, expectations, anguishes and reflections about this future, as well as the identity that will be built, cannot be reached with management tools simply, it is necessary to trust the school institution and a society that is prepared to welcome these students when completing this stage of secondary education, which does not end there.

In the student's notebook, we can analyze the table where the thematic units, learning situations and socio-emotional skills related to the life project are presented. It is interesting to note that the thematic units have as a single phrase "who I am and the choices I make", as shown in the following component table of the first three quarters of the first year, which are repeated in the other semesters, of high school:

	CURRICULUM PAULISTA	
	Life Project	
	1st GRADE HIGH SCHOOL	
	Firth Bimester	
Thematic units	Learning situation	Socio-emotional skills
Who I am and the choices I make	High school and life project: what I need to know.	Curiosity to learn.
Who I am and the choices I make	Formative self-evaluation	
Who I am and the choices I make	As I see myself	Empathy and self-confidence
Who I am and the choices I make	Where do I come from?	Self-confidence
Who I am and the choices I make	Portable network of possibilities	Artistic interest

<b>Second Bimester</b>		
Thematic units	Learning situation	Socio-emotional skills
Who I am and the choices I make	My values: how to know what matters to me	Self-confidence
Who I am and the choices I make	Formative self-assessment	Socio-emotional skills
Who I am and the choices I make	What it's like to be free, right and wrong	Responsibility
Who I am and the choices I make	Living between generations	Curiosity to learn
Who I am and the choices I make	Says the song: you have to know how to live	Respect
<b>Third Bimester</b>		
Thematic units	Learning situation	Socio-emotional skills
Who I am and the choices I make	Life is a project	Organization and determination.
Who I am and the choices I make	My premises and my starting points	Organization and assertiveness
Who I am and the choices I make	A path to follow, full of goals to be followed	Organization and self-confidence
Who I am and the choices I make	Am I on the right track?	Organization, assertiveness and creative imagination
Who I am and the choices I make	Hit the target: the importance of strategies	Determination
Who I am and the choices I make	Challenge of superpowers	Prioritized competencies for the 1st grade of high school

In fact, the idea of choice represents the centrality of responsibility for the student's success or failure, minimizing relationships, crossings and various social factors.

Alongside the teacher, or even a teacher who takes the time, the figure of the tutor is found in the reference documents of the Life Project enthusiasts. Moran (2016), one of the authors who has assisted in the production of the PEI material, states the following about the figure of the tutor:

A parallel action could be to create a life project tutor per class, which discusses some of these issues with all students and accompanies them along a formative path. A more advanced way is the creation of a mentor per student, who permanently accompanies them during a specific cycle. From a curricular point of view, inserting the project as an integrating axis of values, socio-emotional and cognitive skills, in a personalized way. The student thus realizes that the curriculum speaks what interests him, responds to his anxieties and questions and helps him to broaden his view of the world. It is another way of seeing the school organization more centered on the student, which makes learning much more relevant and meaningful for him (MORAN, 2016, p. 2).

The proposal of the tutor who would accompany the student and would have the function of listening and seeking, together with the student, the possibilities and referrals of activities that would lead to the development of a feasible, achievable life project that takes into account the both the reality and context of life and the dreams of the students is an interesting proposal, but completely distant from the reality that the Brazilian public school presents.

The elements considered most significant in the analysis performed were those described above, and based on such reflections, this paper draws some conclusions below.

## Conclusions

Making students, especially those in high school, reflect on the prospects for the future and the elaboration of a life project is an important issue when thinking about education as a process of social and professional inclusion. However, as discussed in this paper, it is necessary that the proposals that come to be part of the school curriculum, bring perspectives that take into account the concrete situation of life and the historical, social and economic reality of society. Ignoring the way in which production relations are taking place, as well as the way in which society is organized, does not allow one to have the result of what is proposed. Concretely, it is necessary to take into account more than “who I am and the choices I make”, but rather which spaces can contribute both to the elaboration of the life project and its implementation.

In this sense, among different elements to be observed, at least three stand out that are significant in this process, which are: public policies aimed at youth; the importance given by governments to schools and education professionals; and the involvement and support of families, who, especially in developing countries, have difficulties in accompanying and assisting students in their educational trajectory and in their social and professional insertion.

Different studies show the importance of public policies and support networks in inducing actions that may contribute to the reflection on the future prospects of the young population, especially the less favoured ones. The discussion presented by Germano and Colaço (2012) corroborates this conclusion by calling attention to the importance of analysing the action schemes adopted by young people in order to overcome the difficulties they experience, generally associated with the family's financial conditions.

In addition to public policies, the school can become a space for reflection on thinking about the life project, bringing families to collaborate with this process. But what does it mean to bring families into the school space? First, it is to recognize the school as a place for exchanges, both of knowledge and culture. Schools that respect and recognize that there is a culture present in the daily lives of populations living in precarious situations, a family culture, a culture that is often different from that established in the school, but which cannot be ignored as it is present in the lives of students and determinant, often, of the possible “choices” of the students' future.

Another fundamental issue is the articulation that must exist between schools and support networks, whether governmental or social, which can join efforts to help project the future of young people.

In conclusion, it is stated that the work of preparing the life project of young people, especially those in high school, should be thought of as a set of actions that take into account both the concrete reality of these students, their culture, the economic and social, but also the support networks, whether public or from the economic and social sectors, in addition to the curricular structure of the schools.

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