

## EXPERIENCES IN THE FAMILY CONTEXT AND THE CONSTITUTION OF SENSES ABOUT EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** Based on Historical Cultural Psychology, the goal of this study is to present a discussion about the intimate relationship between experiences in familiar contexts and the constitution of senses about education. Based in the historical dialectical materialism, we highlight that during the process of our empiric and theoretical research, which involved four juveniles, former high schoolers, the familiar relationships were brought in a very intense way in their narratives about the schooling process, leading us to reorganize our theoretical study, including a review about the historical and social construction of family, and widened our empirical investigation, making not only a primary interview, but, also, recurrent interviews, based in a semi-structured script. Our analysis were based in both Vigotski theoretical proposals and the Historical Cultural Psychology continuators. The results indicate that the experiences in the familiar environment and the meanings about education shared in the family guide the process of construction of personal senses of the juvenile about education, which happened both from concrete experiences, because their shared determined life circumstances inside the familiar group, and from the symbolic point of view resulting of the appropriation of familiar meanings in interpersonal exchanges.

**Keywords:** Family; experiences; senses.

## VIVÊNCIAS NO CONTEXTO FAMILIAR E A CONSTITUIÇÃO DE SENTIDOS SOBRE A EDUCAÇÃO

**RESUMO.** Com base na Psicologia Histórico-Cultural, neste estudo temos como objetivo apresentar uma discussão acerca da íntima relação entre as vivências no contexto familiar e a constituição de sentidos sobre a educação. Fundamentadas no método do materialismo histórico-dialético, destacamos que no processo de nossa pesquisa teórica-empírica, que envolveu quatro jovens egressos do ensino médio, as relações familiares foram trazidas de maneira muito intensa em suas narrativas sobre o processo de escolarização, fazendo com que reorganizássemos nosso estudo teórico, incluindo uma revisão sobre a construção histórica e social da família, e ampliássemos nossa investigação empírica, realizando não só entrevistas iniciais, mas também entrevistas recorrentes, com base em roteiro semiestruturado. Nossas análises se pautaram tanto nas teorizações de Vigotski, como nos continuadores da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural. Os resultados indicam que as vivências no ambiente familiar e os significados sobre educação compartilhados na família norteiam o processo de formação de sentidos pessoais dos jovens sobre educação, o que se deu tanto do ponto das experiências concretas, por compartilharem determinadas circunstâncias de vida dentro do grupo familiar, como do ponto de vista simbólico resultante das apropriações dos significados familiares nas trocas interpessoais.

**Palavras-chave:** Família; vivências; sentidos.

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## VIVENCIAS EN EL CONTEXTO FAMILIAR Y LA CONSTITUCIÓN DE SENTIDOS SOBRE LA

**RESUMEN.** Con base en la Psicología Histórico Cultural, el objetivo de este estudio es presentar una discusión sobre la íntima relación entre las vivencias en contextos familiares y la constitución de sentidos sobre la educación. Con base en el materialismo dialéctico histórico, destacamos que durante el proceso de nuestra investigación empírica y teórica, que involucró a cuatro jóvenes, ex-secundarios, las relaciones familiares fueron traídas de manera muy intensa en sus narrativas sobre el proceso de escolarización, llevándonos a reorganizar nuestro estudio teórico, incluyendo una revisión sobre la construcción histórica y social de la familia, y ampliar nuestra investigación empírica, realizando no solo una entrevista primaria, sino también entrevistas recurrentes, basadas en un guión semiestructurado. Nuestro análisis se basaron tanto en las propuestas teóricas de Vigotski como en las continuadoras de la Psicología Histórica Cultural. Los resultados indican que las vivencias en el ambiente familiar y los significados sobre la educación compartidos en la familia orientan el proceso de construcción de sentidos personales del menor sobre la educación, que se da tanto a partir de experiencias concretas, como de sus circunstancias compartidas de vida determinadas en el seno del grupo familiar, y desde el punto de vista simbólico resultante de la apropiación de significados familiares en los intercambios interpersonales.

**Palabras-clave:** Familia; vivencias; sentidos.

### Introduction

From birth, we are gradually integrated into the social world and begin to learn human forms of interaction. According to Cultural Historical Psychology, it is precisely this learning process, this acquisition of cultural goods, that results in the development of human characteristics in unique individuals. However, since this process is mediated by each person's unique life experiences, it is important to consider the environmental factors and their concrete and symbolic organization to better understand their impact on the formation of subjectivities.

Based on Vigotsky's concepts of lived experience and social situation of development (Vigotski, 2010), the impact of the environment is relative and not absolute in the formation of the psyche; therefore, to understand the formation of senses, it is necessary to understand how experiences occurred in the life history of the subjects.

As a result of a theoretical-empirical study conducted with four young high school graduates, we present a discussion about the close relationship between experiences in the family context and the constitution of senses about education.

Considering the way we are socially organized at this moment in human history, within what we call the family, we have the first caregivers and those responsible for mediating the baby's interaction with the cultural world.

Within the family group, where the child occupies a specific place in the constellation constituted by the set of parents and siblings, the child makes their first learnings about social relationships and feelings. It is for this reason that understanding a child requires understanding the environments in which they develop, not, however, two distinct things that are juxtaposed, but rather accomplishments where each of the two factors updates what is potentially present in the other (Martins, 2001, p. 239).

Thus, in this study, we turn our attention to the family, understood here as a historical and social construct, to reflect on how this form of organization of individuals in society materializes in the human psyche. This is because the psyche is always the psyche of someone, a concrete, temporal subject. Therefore, to understand what is inscribed in human genericity, it is necessary to know the singular in its dialectical relationship with the universal, as mediated by the particular.

We will discuss the family from a historical perspective, since at the base of our social organization, we have the nuclear or petit-bourgeois family as a family model, which, according to

Romanelli (2002), Barroco (2012) and Durigan (2015), predominates both in the type of concrete composition, and in the ideology of the different layers of society.

From the perspective of the dialectical historical materialist method, the nuclear family, as we conceive it today, is a product of capitalist organization: “[...] the family is a product of the social system and will reflect its culture” (Engels, 2012, p. 82). According to Hobsbawm (1995), the changes triggered by the Industrial Revolution involved the division of labor, the development of cities, and the separation of the workplace from the domestic space, among many other significant modifications. Consequently, human relations were transformed, and the family became a private place of intimate experience. According to Ariès (1981), the family, from a closed society, assumed new characteristics, especially regarding children’s education. The role of parents changed, assuming the functions of guardians of the spiritual life of their children and being responsible for their physical bodies. According to the author, as children’s education gained importance in society and they began to be directed to school, reducing their interaction with society more broadly and consequently becoming restricted to their families, the relationships between parents and children became more intimate. Thus, in a gradual process that accelerated after the Industrial and French Revolutions, the bourgeois family became the hegemonic model, family relationships became increasingly closed, and individualism emerged and took on clearer contours as capitalism and liberal ideology consolidated.

In contemporary times, family configurations differ from the traditional model. Currently, in Brazil, according to data from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), since 2005, the profile composed solely of the father, mother, and children has ceased to be the majority in Brazilian households, corresponding, in 2015, to 42.3% of the homes surveyed, and other configurations have increased. “In 2015, for example, almost one in five households was composed only of couples without children (19.9%), while in 14.4% of homes there was only one resident” (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics [IBGE], 2017, p. 18). This variation in family arrangements, with different possibilities in their forms of organization, at least when apprehended in their immediate manifestation, is a result of the socioeconomic changes experienced in the 20th century. This does not occur by chance but corresponds to the needs of neoliberalism. As Lessa (2012) states, the new demands of capital, especially in the post-World War II period, when women became necessary in the productive industry, leaving the domestic sphere and integrating into the labor market, caused the functioning of the family to undergo several changes, involving the husband-wife relationship, the education of children, the organization of the domestic routine, among many others. However, despite the existence of these new family arrangements, the nuclear model still occupies the place of reference in social organization, acting “[...] as a ‘superstructural reference unit’ for other instances such as education and the legal system” (Durigan, 2015, p. 24, emphasis added).

The confinement of coexistence and the primary educational process to small cells has also made the process of cultural appropriation private, increasingly restricted by the values of individualism. The project of constructing singular individuals responds to a globalized context in which the rules of capitalism are decisive and reproduced in small family spaces. Each family must prepare its children for the ‘struggle’ of the market. The project is to become ‘better than the other’, to win the race for a place in the sun in a capitalist society.

Lessa (2012) explains that the movement of intensification of individualism stems from the fear that individuals have of the future, of what their living conditions will be like in a world where the intensification of socioeconomic differences is observed. Therefore, although there are characteristics that distinguish families in contemporary times, the bourgeois model underlies their constitution, since liberal principles remain present in their functioning, even in varying forms and intensities. As a small group, families seek to defend the interests of their members and educate

them to compete in the social sphere. The family is the primary shaper of individuals, with the family environment being the space for early experiences, the appropriation of meanings, and the construction of understandings about the world. For a better understanding of these concepts, we provide a brief theoretical discussion.

There is a close relationship between lived experience and the construction of senses, both concepts being related to the process of psychic development and the constitution of individuals' personalities. As described by Vigotsky (1934/2010), lived experience is understood as a psychic process that expresses the unity between a child's personality and the environment at a given moment in their development. According to the author, to understand how the environment influences development, it is necessary to approach it in relative terms, considering how aspects of the environment affect the child based on their own characteristics, their age when a certain situation occurs. This relationship between the child and environment has been termed the social situation of development, summarized by Bozhovich (1976, p. 99, our translation)<sup>5</sup> as follows:

[...] that special combination of internal developmental processes and external conditions, which is typical at each age and which also conditions the dynamics of psychic development during the corresponding evolutionary period and the new, qualitatively peculiar psychological formations that emerge at the end of that period.

According to Bozhovich (1976), understanding the social situation of development occurs through lived experience, which constitutes the unit of analysis of this phenomenon, in which what the child brings and what they experience in the environment are represented as indivisible. Understood as a unit of analysis, the concept of lived experience encompasses both conscious and unconscious aspects, affects, and thoughts, in short, a complex whole that makes up the human personality. Furthermore, lived experience is a concept that expresses the dialectic of human development in the uninterrupted interrelation between the external and psychic (internal) environment in continuous movement.

Vigotski (2010) explained this relationship between what the subject brings and what he/she experiences in the environment by citing a case in which three children of different ages were affected in completely different ways by the behavior of their mother, who had mental disorders due to alcoholism. According to the author, although all had dysfunctions in their development, each presented a very different condition: the youngest, with fewer possibilities for defense and understanding, developed defensive symptoms, evidencing the fear and despair experienced; the middle child manifested a contradictory affective attitude, since the mother was for him, at the same time, an object of love and fear; while the oldest demonstrated an early responsible attitude, assuming the role of protector of his younger siblings. The case of these three siblings illustrates well that

[...] the same situation in the environment and the same occurrence in an environment of several people, surprising them at different age levels, has a different influence on the development of each individual. [...] This is because the relationship of each of them to the events is different. We could also say that each of these children experienced this situation in different ways (Vigotsky, 2010, p. 685, emphasis added).

In this sense, each person's experience functioned as a prism through which their situation was refracted in their development. According to Vigotsky (2010, p. 686, emphasis added), it is this child's relationship with the environment that we must seek to understand the influence of lived

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<sup>5</sup> “[...] aquella combinación especial de los procesos internos del desarrollo y de las condiciones externas, que es típica en cada etapa y que condiciona también la dinámica del desarrollo psíquico durante el correspondiente período evolutivo y las nuevas formaciones psicológicas, cualitativamente peculiares, que surgen hacia el final de dicho período”.

situations on development, “[...] the child’s experience, that is, how they ‘become aware’ and conceive, how they ‘affectively relate’ to a certain event.”

According to Vigotsky (2010), language, through the meanings it carries, allows psychic contact between subjects and, through its internalization, the individual’s contact with themselves (as an instrument of thought). It is worth noting that the meanings of words are always a generalization and, depending on the child’s degree of apprehension/understanding, are different from what they are for adults. Children understand things in parts, and therefore their generalization is more linked to their experience, not yet being a concept, which has a long way to go in terms of formation.

Awareness is related to the capacity for generalization. Therefore, a child’s age and level of thought development – in which education plays a significant role – influence how they internalize meaning and form a sense through experience. This implies that “[...] the development of thought itself, the meaning of children’s words, determines a new relationship that can exist between the environment and individual developmental processes” (Vygotsky, 2010, p. 691). Thus, through the process of generalization, lived experiences can be given meaning by the subject, may gain a personal sense, and become content of consciousness, giving subjectivity its singular character. As Beatón (2017, p. 166, emphasis added) states,

[...] this is the internal mechanism for constructing meanings and essentially personal senses. That is why Vigotsky states that experiences acquire sense. Experiences are generalized and converted into meanings, and as they continue to be experienced in relation to social and cultural conditions, which propose new demands, they are converted into senses for the subject. In this way, the social and cultural conditions that contain the activity, the communication, through the interpersonal relationships immersed in them, and the experience that the subject lives acquire, for the subject, meanings of one type or another, through the experiences they produce. Therefore, I conclude that this is the mechanism of subjectivation of the social, cultural, activity, and communication.

As previously mentioned, the expansion of the capacity for generalization, a characteristic of conceptual thinking, promotes a significant change in the way we experience situations and how we give them meaning, that is, in how we attribute sense to them. Thus, if senses are formed from experiences and constitute part of consciousness, experiences interfere with the development of consciousness. Therefore, through the investigation of experiences, we can broaden our understanding of the paths of the formation of the singular, even when we think of individuals in similar conditions.

### **Method and procedure for data collection and organization**

Based on the method of dialectical historical materialism and its philosophical assumptions, we sought to understand the movement of constructing senses in the objective/subjective interconnection, in the dynamics of the subject-environment relationship, in dialectical processuality, considering the principles of totality and historicity of phenomena, starting from appearance towards essence, through the reconstruction of reality by thought.

Approved by the Ethics Committee (Opinion No. 3.072-133. CAAE 02024418.3.0000.0104) and configured as a longitudinal study, the research in question involved some participants from research conducted during a master’s degree<sup>6</sup>. Using the identification forms that were completed at that time, we contacted eight of the participants from that research, to whom we extended an invitation to participate again, also on a voluntary basis. However, only four formalized their acceptance by signing the informed consent form, attending the scheduled times for the interviews,

<sup>6</sup> Melo, L. C. B. (2017). O sentido e o significado do ensino médio para os estudantes: um estudo a partir da psicologia histórico-cultural. [Dissertação de Mestrado] Universidade Estadual de Maringá. <http://repositorio.uem.br:8080/jspui/handle/1/3067>.

which followed a semi-structured script, and were recorded. Thus, the empirical study involved four young people (Clara, Carmen, Murilo, and Tiago<sup>7</sup>), aged between 18 and 19. Three of them were already attending higher education, and one was finishing high school.

In the course of the investigation, after the initial interviews and analysis of the information gathered, we identified some recurring and prominent aspects, forming a common thread in the participants' stories, especially regarding the role of the family in shaping their personal senses about education. In an attempt to understand this phenomenon, we sought further information through recurring interviews, altering our research focus to some extent, and reorganizing our study and theoretical framework. This indicates that the delimitation of the object of study and the path to be followed are not predetermined but are created as we approach them, trying to unveil their hidden relationships.

After conducting all the interviews and transcribing them in full, the information was organized based on the regularities found in the different life stories, resulting in thematic axes, one of which is presented in this text.

## **Results and Discussions**

To present the results and their respective discussions, we sought to construct a line of analysis of the participants' experiences by understanding their life paths in conjunction with the trajectories of their families. Understood as social beings, whose psychic constitution is structured from the relationships that each one establishes with the members of the groups to which they belong, the family occupies a prominent place, since it is within the family that the individual begins the appropriation of human knowledge and the social way of life in a given time and place. Furthermore, because this appropriation is mediated by the family, the social meanings assimilated by it, as well as the senses constructed throughout its history, have a great impact on the formation of its unique individuals, insofar as they appropriate the world supported by the ways of perceiving and experiencing it, belonging to their family group.

Despite the existence of similarities, which can be understood from macro historical-social determinants, such as the bourgeois model of family groups, we can also perceive differences in the trajectory of families and their members when we compare the narratives of the young people interviewed. However, this comparison should not be understood in terms of better or worse but should guide our gaze towards the diversity of situations and life contexts that must be considered when we aim to understand the experiences of individuals.

We begin our analysis by looking at the family composition of the young people interviewed. Murilo's family fits the pattern of the traditional, matrimonial family, as presented by Durigan (2015), being composed of four members: father (50 years old), mother (49 years old), sister (29 years old), and himself (19 years old), although his sister lives in another house, as she is married.

With a similar composition, Tiago's family consists of his father, mother, two brothers (29 and 24 years old), and himself (19 years old). Tiago is currently the only child living with his parents, as his brothers are already married.

Carmen's family also fits the traditional pattern of a married family, consisting of her father (47 years), her mother (39 years), two brothers (14 and 21 years), and herself (20 years). Due to the adoption process of a young man who is currently 34 years old and no longer lives with them, as he got married and has a daughter, this group also integrates the pattern of a substitute family (Durigan, 2015). It is worth noting that, at present, her fiancé (27 years old) lives with her family.

In contrast, Clara has five siblings, of whom only two are her father's. Her mother had a son before starting her relationship with her father, with whom she had her brother (19 years old), herself

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<sup>7</sup> Fictitious names assigned to participants.

(18 years old), and her sister (16 years old). After the couple's breakup, the father remarried a woman who already had a son (who lived in another state). Her mother went through several relationships, having two more children, a boy (12 years old) and a girl (10 years old). According to her account, during her childhood, due to the separation between her father and mother and her mother abandoning her children three times, Clara and her siblings lived under the care of different family members at specific times in their lives. At some periods, she lived with her parents and siblings, at others with an aunt, living with her cousins, and at still others with her mother, her boyfriend, her brothers, and half-siblings. Currently, her mother and half-siblings are in the state of São Paulo, and Clara resides in Paraná with her father, two brothers, and her stepmother, forming what is termed, according to Durigan (2015), a multi-parental family, due to the diversity of bonds established from new unions.

All these family configurations are now legally recognized as organizational possibilities. However, beyond the legal framework, it is necessary that such arrangements be understood as a social construct and viewed for what they are, not as what they should be when compared to the bourgeois nuclear family model, which is often ideologically considered universal (Barroco, 2012). This is especially necessary in the field of psychology, where it is essential to understand the multiple situations that comprise a given phenomenon, avoiding the formal logic of cause and effect in a linear and restrictive view of the psychic constitution of individuals.

However, this does not mean that we should disregard the influence of family arrangements on psychic development, as it is a concrete variable in the lives of individuals. We only emphasize that, as a concrete aspect, whatever it may be, this arrangement will constitute an influence of the external environment on the psychological formation of singular subjects. In this sense, all characteristics of family composition must be considered when seeking to understand the experiences of young people, since the family is the first space of human learning. However, according to Vygotsky (2010), such aspects of the environment should not be understood in an absolute way, as a direct and determining influence, but in a relative way, since other aspects, including the level of development of the subjects at each moment of their lives, will affect the mode and intensity of the influence of external aspects.

Considering Clara's story for analysis, we perceive that concrete circumstances led her to assume the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings, temporarily occupying the role of mother. These specific conditions, combined with Clara's age and developmental level at the time, were components of her social development situation at the end of her childhood. Regarding this, Clara stated that having to care for her siblings was not perceived by her at that time as something so difficult; it was not a burden, and she remembered it as a phase also marked by joy, such as taking care of her sister, who, for her, was like a little doll.

Based on this account, we can understand what Vygotsky (2010) states about the relative influence of the environment, where both the external and internal characteristics of the individual integrate the experiences of the subjects. For him, it is the relationship of a given child, at a certain level of development, with an environment and its specific circumstances that constitutes the basis for experiences and the formation of meaning. Therefore, what may initially seem extremely difficult and burdensome from an adult's perspective may not be experienced that way by the child, as in Clara's case regarding the care of her siblings. It is interesting to note that, although the concrete circumstances of the family dynamic compelled Clara to learn adult activities, such as cooking, taking care of the house, and the children, the fact that she could perform activities such as playing, going to school, and studying guaranteed, at least in part, a space for her to develop activities that corresponded to the needs and motives of her stage of development. The very way of referring to

her sister, as a little doll, reveals a playful aspect of how she relates to her, and therefore, the personal sense underlying these activities makes this experience relatively positive.

Regarding Clara's family life, the situations of abandonment by her mother reveal a difference in how she felt and perceived them. About the first time, she said that she did not even remember it properly because she was very young. Regarding the third time, she mentioned how difficult the abandonment was and became emotional during the interview when recounting her memories. Based on her account, we find Vigotsky's (2010) assertions about the importance of language and thought development and the processes of generalization, which allow individuals a different understanding at each moment of their childhood; that is, they allow children to symbolize what they experience so that the experience becomes part of their conscious understanding. It is evident how much suffering Clara endured the third time her mother left them, not only because of the meaning of the act itself but also because of the weight of responsibility that fell on her shoulders, having to be responsible for everything in the house and taking care of her siblings, especially the youngest, who was ill. Her awareness of her immense responsibility, coupled with her perception of her inability to handle everything due to her childhood, generated a negative experience marked by feelings of helplessness and anguish. Recalling this experience and bringing it back to consciousness, Clara becomes emotional and bursts into tears, highlighting the affective-cognitive unity of this experience. On the other hand, considering the dialectical movement of the process of psychic development and formation, the experience becomes integrated into the subject's formation, impacting the direction of this process. In Clara's case, this is made explicit when she assesses that the difficult situations she experienced transformed her into who she is today, as described in the following excerpt from the recurring interview (August 6, 2019):

I'm Clara. I think I'm very responsible for my age. I've already experienced a lot of suffering. But I've learned a lot from my mistakes. But I learn a lot from my mistakes. I'm very determined [...] It's hard to say this, but today I see myself as a person [...] I'm capable, you know? I'm eighteen years old and have been through a lot, though nobody would guess it. I want to take this as a learning experience, though.

Returning to the discussion about the other cases under study, as we can see, Tiago and Murilo are the youngest in their families, Carmen is the couple's only daughter, the others are all boys, and Clara is the oldest girl among her siblings. Unlike her, the other research participants report having both parents and siblings during childhood. They only stopped having daily contact with their families when they got older and got married.

The analysis of Carmen and Murilo's life trajectories reveals the significant influence of their parents and siblings on the paths they have chosen. When asked to name someone who inspires him, Murilo points to no one other than his parents. He describes them with great admiration, as seen in the following excerpts: (Recurring interview with Murilo, August 2, 2019, emphasis added):

Well, I really admire my mother for her persistence and willpower. My mother is the kind of person [...] who lives life with the attitude that nothing is difficult! Whatever you want to do, you just have to put in the effort or study, and you can achieve it. My mother is the kind of person for whom there are no obstacles. Whatever she wants to do, she finds a way to do it. Whether I wanted to or not, I tried to bring that attitude into my life, and I still do.

I admire my father's proactivity. That's it. The values I value most are proactivity, effort, and humility. These are the qualities I strive to embody.

Carmen also has her family and the relationships established within it as a model to be followed. She also chooses her father as a representative of this ideal:

My father is an inspiration to me. He has always been a great motivator. He has always enjoyed

motivating people, including me. He is a very kind person. He is affectionate. He is calm. So for me, it's his kindness, encouragement, and character. (Recurring interview with Carmen, August 13, 2019).

Furthermore, Carmen mentions that having lived in an accepting and respectful environment, she cannot fathom a lack of love. Having experienced sharing at different moments in her life, it is a central value for her. One of the most influential events in her life was the adoption of her brother, with whom she formed bonds of affection and mutual support. Based on her choices, it is possible to affirm that this experience greatly impacted her life. This is somewhat corroborated by the fact that her adoptive brother is a missionary, and Carmen demonstrates a desire to carry out a project to help others. In fact, it is her desire to help others that brought her and her fiancé closer, as they share the same dream. Even the choice of a spouse was influenced by her family's positive experience with adoption. Examples of these impacts can be seen in the following excerpts from Carmen's answers about her future projects (Recurring interview with Carmen, August 13, 2019, emphasis added):

[...] I would like to graduate. I want to work in my field. Get married. I would like to have children, you know? Both my own and adopted. I would like to adopt two more children. It's a dream, and thankfully, my fiancé shares it.

When we met, I had a project. I didn't intend to create an NGO, but I planned to go to the Northeast and work on planting projects for children and families. He already had a project to create an NGO to help people there. Then the two projects came together... and (laughs).

Clara also cites her father as a source of inspiration, particularly with regard to her school and professional life. She expresses this in the following excerpt:

[...] always my father. Even today. I don't want to be like him. But I want to get to a point where he got. It wasn't easy for him either. He had to take care of his siblings as a child. In his case, it was just him and my grandmother. You know, my father started at the bank as a delivery boy. He became a financial manager, you know? So I keep looking at that part of my father's life and saying, That's what I want. Like, in college, he worked and came home late at night. I would wake up in the middle of the night and see him studying statistics. I saw him studying! I don't see my father studying today, but he continues to be the center of everything, you know? (Recurring interview with Clara, August 6, 2019).

Her mother also serves as a reference, albeit in an opposite way. She considers her mother's behavior a negative model, a parameter of what she does not intend to be. This seems to be so strong that, when asked who would be a negative role model of a human being for her, Clara answered, without hesitation: "Oh, my mother! (laughs)" (Recurring interview with Clara, August 6, 2019).

Reflecting on the centrality of the family as a reference for these young people, we highlight two points to be analyzed throughout our discussion: a) the importance of experiences as sources for forming senses about the world, and, in our case, about education; b) precisely because of this predominance of the family, there is an enormous risk of restricting the symbolic universe, whose formation of senses may be subjected to the experiences and meanings shared within this space.

Furthermore, by cross-referencing the responses of these three young people, we perceive that the aspect of professional achievement is valued by Murilo and Clara, who see studies as a passport to personal, professional, and social advancement. They highlight the willpower of their mother (Murilo) and father (Clara) in seeking educational improvement with the goal of obtaining new jobs. On the other hand, Carmen's response emphasizes the value of solidarity, in which knowledge is a means of qualification that can serve to better help others, as she explains in the following excerpt:

After all that, after finishing my fourth or fifth year and completing my internship, my fiancé and I plan

to move to the Northeast. I want to use my profession there and help the people, you know? I want to help the people there, like the small farmers who can't plant due to a lack of water. I want to start an irrigation project [...] (Initial interview with Carmen, December 12, 2018).

In all three cases, it is possible to identify that the sense attributed by the family to education and knowledge is embraced by the young. This fact can be explained by the relationship between sense and activity, which mark man's action on the world, in which motives are linked to ends, as described by Leontiev (1983). When parents act in the world with a specific purpose, they guide family life in a given direction, generating new situations and circumstances that then become part of the external environment of the entire family group and, dialectically, constitute the social situation of development, in which the experiences and personal senses of each of its members will be formed.

From this perspective, the more individuals are subjects of their own history, aware of their motives and purposes as they engage with the world, the more they influence the social situation and development of other subjects by modifying the environment and creating new circumstances. Conversely, as Martins (2001) explains, the more human actions are alienated, subordinated to external factors, and disconnected from motives and goals, the fewer opportunities there are for awareness and unification of meanings and senses. Certain living conditions, in which there is no space for constructing motives and purposes that drive human activity, "[...] promote divisions within the person. These conditions obliterate the person's consciousness to such an extent that life itself appears independent of the person. It is in the impossibility of being the subject of one's own history that the person, through their thoughts, acts, and feelings, belongs less and less to themselves" (Martins, 2001, p. 242).

Unlike the others, Tiago does not point to his family or any of its members as role models or sources of inspiration. While other young people have family members who can guide them through life, provide clear examples, and offer well-trodden paths to follow, including through the schooling process, Tiago seems to lack these resources. He is the first in his family to complete high school. Perhaps that is why, when asked about someone who inspires him, he mentioned an anime character.

*Well, I have an inspiration. It's a character from an anime. So, Naruto was a guy who, in his childhood, was always labeled a monster. He kind of has a fox inside him. Anyway, when he grows up, he gets strong and saves the world several times. Now, he's labeled a hero. He always had this admiration because he never gives up on anything. He keeps his word: "I'm going to save such-and-such person, and I will do it, even if it takes years". He's going to save someone, and he goes and rescues them (Recurring interview with Tiago, July 24, 2019, emphasis added).*

It is worth noting that the students were asked to choose a public figure or character who represented values they had or wanted to have. Three of the four young people pointed to their own parents, which went against the initial request. As Bozhovich (1976) explains, at each stage of development, students' ideals have different characteristics. Typically, children choose someone in their immediate life as a representative of their ideals. However, as they grow older, they are inspired by heroic figures from history and literature. Later, they can no longer represent their ideals in one person, but rather in typical acts, manifestations of certain characteristics they value.

Even though Clara, Carmen, and Murilo chose a family member as a representative of their ideals, they made some points or reservations, explaining which behaviors justify their choices. Similarly, Tiago explained which characteristics underpinned his choice. However, his response was quite different from the other participants', leading us to reflect on why he finds inspiration in anime.

Based on the lack of mention of Tiago's parents and siblings throughout the two interviews, who are only brought up when specifically questioned about his family, we hypothesize a significant

absence of reference points. In this case, the parents occupy neither the role of model nor support for this young man. This hypothesis gains further traction when considering what Tiago considers an ideal family: one formed by people who like each other, where the parents support their children, help them, participate in their lives, and are concerned about their experiences at different stages of life.

We hypothesize that the lack of guidance from Tiago's parents may reflect their belief that one cannot control the course of one's own life. According to this belief, forces greater than oneself and beyond one's control determine one's trajectory. Therefore, the individual can do nothing. This belief in an inability to control one's life is evident in Tiago's case, as he is the only one among all those interviewed who has not yet completed high school. Furthermore, he dropped out of the integrated high school program with only one year left. While we cannot disregard the objective difficulty of studying at a federal school while working, the lack of role models must be considered as a factor in understanding this young man's path, especially since he will be the first in his family to complete basic education. This is indicative of his family's history of expropriation of opportunities for humanization through education.

Let us now analyze the socioeconomic situation of the families, as this is a concrete aspect that contributes to the organization of the lives of its members, both in terms of their work routines and their access to material and cultural goods. According to the participants' statements on the identification form, Clara, Murilo, and Carmen consider themselves to belong to the middle class, and Tiago to the lower middle class. We lack objective information about the families' income, so we cannot make categorical statements about the socioeconomic classification made by the interviewees. Nevertheless, based on the parents' level of education, their professions, and the jobs they have held throughout their lives, we can infer their social class. This inference is especially valid if we consider the family's economic situation throughout the participants' lives and not just at the present moment.

According to Tiago and Carmen's accounts, their parents and older siblings did not complete basic education. In both cases, we identify the humble origins of the parents, who had to abandon their studies to contribute to their families through rural labor. The limited access to education, imposed by the need to work, brings us back, as Martins (2001, p. 239, author's emphasis) explains, "[...] to the fact so emphasized by Marx, that the poverty of the worker, converted into a commodity, is not exhausted in a strictly material poverty, but at the same time, falls into the impoverishment of his inner world," which is the greatest expropriation that subjects can suffer.

Clara's parents both have unfinished degrees: her father completed his penultimate year in the Administration program, and her mother completed part of a Mathematics degree more recently. Her older siblings did not finish high school either. However, she mentions other family members, such as uncles and aunts, who have a higher level of education. The fact that Clara was cared for by her aunt for a period of time exposed her to different perspectives on education. This once again makes us reflect on the complexity of the impact of life events on a person and the negative and positive consequences they may have.

Among the four interviewees, Murilo's family, according to his account and assessment, is the one that has most significantly changed its financial condition throughout its history. He described his parents' entire journey, who did not even have a basic education before getting married. Afterwards, they struggled while working hard and studying at night until they earned diplomas in technical courses, undergraduate, and postgraduate studies. Similarly, Murilo emphasized his sister's journey, which follows the same logic: dedication to and pursuit of higher education, which guarantees her new job opportunities. Based on his account, it is clear that education is highly valued in Murilo's family. They view it as a gateway to better living conditions that largely depend on each

individual's effort and willpower. This value is shared by the family and constitutes a pillar of its organization as a group, as well as a central value in the life of each of its members.

According to Romanelli (2000), economic capital is not the greatest asset left by a family, but rather education, and therefore families tend to invest different efforts in the schooling process of their children, especially because the value attributed to it is related to professional qualification. However, the author himself pointed out at the beginning of the 21st century that "[...] school capital is subject to premature obsolescence, due to changes in jobs, and needs to be constantly renewed [...]" (Romanelli, 2000, p. 105). This is already experienced and understood by Murilo's parents, who have continuously sought new courses to maintain better employability conditions.

Once again, we return to Vigotsky's (2009) statement about the formation of meanings from social practice and its historical mutability, incorporating new layers and symbolic trends resulting from the continuous movement existing between environmental and psychological processes. This situation highlights the formation of subjectivity linked to objectivity and the singular dimension linked to the particular dimension of existence.

### Final considerations

In our analysis process, we found that it is impossible to effectively separate experiences specific to a single social space because schooling is an integral part of life in post-industrial societies like Brazil. These experiences express the unity between individuals' external and internal worlds. Therefore, experiences include those related to family and school life, with continuous and mutual influence between these two spheres.

However, we identified the significant influence of the meanings about education shared in the family, guiding the process of forming personal senses of the interviewed young people, which occurred through concrete experiences, such as sharing life circumstances within the family, and through symbolic appropriation of family values in interpersonal exchanges. Since the family is the first space of socialization, what is initially learned and reinforced through daily experiences becomes integrated into the psyche and mediates one's relationship with the world. Thus, individuals begin their school life with a certain understanding of education, and develop personal senses based on their experiences throughout the schooling process. To understand these senses, it is necessary to broaden the perspective to include the social interactions that occur at the intersection of family and school life. In this regard, although our study identified the great relevance of meanings shared by families in forming the personal senses of our research participants, we acknowledge the limitations of generalizing these results due to the small number of participants in our study. We emphasize the need for further research in this area.

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**Data availability:** Data availability: The dataset supporting the results of this study is published in the article itself.

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