

**CAREER GUIDANCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF LIFE PROJECTS: AN  
EXPERIENCE REPORT IN PUBLIC SCHOOL**

***ORIENTAÇÃO PROFISSIONAL NA CONSTRUÇÃO DE PROJETOS DE VIDA: UM  
RELATO DE EXPERIÊNCIA NA ESCOLA PÚBLICA***

***ORIENTACIÓN PROFESIONAL EN LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE PROYECTOS DE  
VIDA: UN RELATO DE EXPERIENCIA EN LA ESCUELA PÚBLICA***



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**ABSTRACT:** This is an experience report of Professional Guidance carried out in a public school in the Municipality of Maracanaú-CE with students in the 3rd year of high school. The objective of this article is to present an experience report with a Professional Guidance group as a mediating instrument in the construction of life projects with students from a public school. The group called *Construindo Caminhos* consisted of four meetings. Professional Guidance was carried out from a socio-historical perspective, in which the individual is understood in a broad and contextualized way, with the main objective being to understand the socio-historical reality and its contradictions and from this and mediate awareness in choices. With this, it is observed that Professional Guidance from a socio-historical perspective is capable of mediating through instruments the construction of life projects for students from public schools.

**KEYWORDS:** Career Guidance. Projects of life. Public School.

**RESUMO:** *Trata-se de um relato de experiência de Orientação Profissional realizada numa escola pública do Estado do Ceará, localizada no Município de Maracanaú com os alunos do 3º ano do ensino médio. O objetivo desse artigo é apresentar um relato de experiência com um grupo de Orientação Profissional como instrumento mediador na construção de projetos de vida com alunos de uma escola pública. O grupo chamado de Construindo Caminhos foi constituído de quatro encontros. A Orientação Profissional foi realizada numa perspectiva sócio-histórica, em que o indivíduo é compreendido de forma ampla e contextualizada, sendo o principal objetivo compreender a realidade sócio-histórica e suas contradições e a partir disso e mediar uma tomada de consciência nas escolhas, pensando nos caminhos possíveis e desejáveis. Com isso, observa-se que a Orientação Profissional na perspectiva sócio-histórica é capaz de mediar através de instrumentos a construção de projetos de vida de alunos oriundos de escolas públicas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Orientação Profissional. Projeto de Vida. Escola Pública.*

**RESUMEN:** *Se trata de un relato de experiencia de Orientación Profesional realizada en una escuela pública del Municipio de Maracanaú-CE con alumnos del 3º año de secundaria. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar un relato de experiencia con un grupo de Orientación Profesional como instrumento mediador en la construcción de proyectos de vida con estudiantes de una escuela pública. El grupo denominado Construindo Caminhos estuvo formado por cuatro reuniones. La Orientación Profesional se realizó desde una perspectiva sociohistórica, en la que se comprende al individuo de manera amplia y contextualizada, teniendo como objetivo principal comprender la realidad sociohistórica y sus contradicciones y a partir de ésta mediar en la toma de conciencia en las elecciones. Con esto, se observa que la Orientación Profesional desde una perspectiva sociohistórica es capaz de mediar a través de instrumentos en la construcción de proyectos de vida de estudiantes de escuelas públicas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Orientación Profesional. Proyecto de Vida. Escuela Pública.*

## Introduction

The reality of Brazilian public schools is the subject of intense debate and constant change. It is not new that problems persist. According to Botelho, Cunha and Bicalho (2020), the school is a great instrument of socialization and the issues that arise within the school environment need to be understood beyond these spaces. In other words, the problems faced within the public school go beyond the walls, they are part of a political, economic and social project that aims to maintain the context of precariousness and withdrawal of rights from the poor population in the country.

According to Zan and Krawczyk (2019), secondary education is the weakest link in Brazilian education and the most sensitive to political crises. Its identity is constantly being questioned, its role in public schools has been to prepare students for work, with little chance of continuing on to higher education. However, Lima *et al.* (2020) analyze that under the logic of neoliberalism, high school is seen as a time of strictly individual choice, in which young people have the power to choose which path to take when they finish basic education. However, the reality is that for many young people the end of secondary school is also the end of their school career. Especially for students from public schools, where the possibilities of continuing on to higher education seem very distant, diverse and unfocused for the secondary school they attended. This reality is gradually being changed with the implementation of public policies such as the Quota Law for access to higher education, which are still insufficient to meet the needs and expectations of a student whose goal is work and not schooling.

We know that the quota policy currently in force through Law n. 12,711, of 29 August 2012 (Brasil, 2012a), which provides for admission to higher and technical education in federal institutions, regulated through Decree n. 7,824/2012 (Brasil, 2012b), is an important milestone for students from public schools, black, indigenous or with disabilities. The law guarantees 50% of the places reserved for this public. According to Mocelin (2020), the quota policy hides a history of exclusion from access to higher education, if the black, poor and indigenous population does not access higher education, the effect of this is the continuation of this process for several family generations, the quota policy breaks this cycle. The quota policy is essential and needs to be improved all the time. However, it is still historically fragile and we need educational policies to keep pace with the evolution and continuity of quality higher education.

In this scenario, public school students are faced with a new problem, that of choosing a career and deciding which course to follow in higher education. According to Boneti, Neto and Lima (2018), the logic of neoliberalism introduces a logic of individualization into the

educational process, which impacts on the process of choosing a career. In this way, Professional Orientation (PO) in a contextualized way with the students' scenario within this space can be an important instrument in this process.

According to Bock (2006), PO from a socio-historical perspective questions the liberal conception of the individual, as well as understanding that professions and occupations are not immutable. Thus, it is assumed, beyond the liberal notion, that subjects have the possibility of fighting to change the conditions in which they live, both individually and collectively (Bock, 2006). According to Lima *et al.* (2020), Career Guidance aims to understand the socio-historical reality and its contradictions and, based on this, to mediate an awareness of choices, thinking about possible and desirable paths.

Mandelli *et al.* (2011) point out that the PO helps in the construction of their professional future, in contact with their own life story, with themselves, with the social reality and with information about the job market, young people are also building possibilities for preparing their life project contextualized with the social reality in a way that aligns their dreams with what is possible within the current society.

We start from the understanding that a life project is "the intention to transform reality, guided by a representation of the meaning of this transformation, in which the real conditions in the relationship between past, present and future are taken into account" (Marcelino; Catão; Lima, 2009, p. 547). Furthermore, according to Bastos (2005), career guidance also needs to reach public schools so that they can discuss society, the world of work and career choices based on their realities. Bremm and Bisol (2008) understand that adolescence is a period in which people are constantly invited to think about their life projects, which can help adolescents to construct new meanings about themselves and the world.

Thus, according to Alves and Dayrell (2015), the professional dimension is very important in the discussion about life projects, but it is not enough to address the subject, because talking about life projects cannot be limited to the professional dimension. In addition, the life project is based on the subject's own life story and refers to the process of building the subject's identity. It is a learning process that encompasses the past, present and future, as well as objective and subjective issues. Without losing sight of the fact that we live in a meritocratic society, in which the individual is placed in the position of being solely responsible for their success.

According to Bastos (2005), the socio-economic reality makes it difficult, but does not limit, for young people to make effective career choices, which is why it is necessary to know

who they are, the social and labor market reality, and to understand the meaning of young people's possibilities at the end of high school. With this in mind, the aim of this article is to present an experience report on a Professional Guidance group as a mediating tool in the construction of life projects with students from a public school.

## **Method**

The experience report is a type of qualitative research, which is configured as knowledge, the product of an investigative process, of an individual and collective nature, in which the researcher produces a narrative whose language reveals the elaboration of what happened based on the researcher's perception. It is a technique that enables the apprehension and interpretation of a concentrated reality situation (Daltro; Faria, 2019).

The records of the experience report were compiled in a field diary to help with the research process. According to Medrado, Spink and Mélló (2014), the field diary is an important tool in the construction of a research project. It allows for the enhancement and expansion of information, because in the field diary it is possible to note the perceptions, material conditions of the field and the affections produced in the experience of contact with the interlocutors. The field diary refers to the observation of everyday reality for the construction of scientific knowledge (Frizzo, 2014).

## **Context and Participants**

The career guidance group was held at the public school EEMTI Prof. Antônio Martins Filho, located in the municipality of Maracanaú in the state of Ceará. It is a school under the responsibility of the State Government, where secondary education is provided on a full-time basis. The municipality of Maracanaú is a major industrial hub, and culturally, young people tend to finish high school and enter the job market. The industries present in the city end up attracting young people who have just left high school or are still in high school to make up their workforce (Costa; Silva, 2020).

As it is a full-time school, the class day covers the morning and afternoon shifts, the participants in the intervention were third-year high school students aged between 15 and 18, from the school's two third-year high school classes, with a balanced number of men and women. The approach to the field took place at the beginning of 2022 and was carried out by one of the authors of this article. The school investigated was the same one where the researcher

finished high school and during his time at school he was involved in various projects at the school, being an active and participative student in this space, which made it possible to create a bond with the management, coordination, teachers and staff, a bond that remained even after he finished high school. In addition, having been a student at a small public school, with no history of passing the entrance exam, and having passed the entrance exam for the Psychology course at a public higher education institution in the state of Ceará in 2012, was an important milestone for the school at the time, where there was still little talk about how to enter in higher education level.

When I first approached the school with the aim of carrying out my master's research, the principal asked us to set up a Professional Guidance group with the third-year students who were living the reality of the National High School Exam - ENEM and the entrance exams. This request was granted, even as a way of getting closer to the school, closer to the students, teachers and the school community as a whole. This is how the project entitled "Building Paths" was born. The proposal was presented to the management and teachers, who received it with great enthusiasm.

## **Procedures**

First, there was a meeting with the school management to present the Building Paths project and the proposal for the Professional Guidance Group. Afterwards, there was a time to present the project to the students and publicize the group through classroom visits by the mediating psychologist together with the school management, who went into the classrooms to inform them about the project, the registration period and other relevant information.

Due to the large number of students interested in taking part, we decided to have 4 meetings between September and November 2022. We organized the activities in such a way as to achieve the objective of the intervention, as shown in Table 1. The school has two 3rd grade classes, each containing between thirty-five and forty students. In order to cover both classes, we decided to open 20 places for the project, with ten places for each class. The registration period took place a week before the workshops began with the first meeting. We soon realized that the number of places would not be enough for the number of students interested in taking part, so we decided to increase the number to 30.

**Figure 1 – Organization of the "Building Paths" Project Meetings**

Activities carried out - Building Paths Project	Objective
<p><b>1st Meeting - The start of the journey</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of the Building Paths Project</li> <li>• Presentation round</li> <li>• Dynamics of the Path (about beginnings and arrivals)</li> </ul>	<p>Present the project and mobilize reflection on the reality in which they are inserted</p>
<p><b>2nd Meeting - Where to next?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who am I? Who was I? Who will I be?"</li> <li>• Problematization about the job market with the trigger questions "What are the characteristics of the world of work today?" "What are the difficulties of entering the job market?" "How do you plan to enter the world of work?"</li> </ul>	<p>Reflect on identity. Think critically about current reality, understanding the social, economic and political context.</p>
<p><b>3rd Meeting - Between the curves</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video presentation: "Life choices"</li> <li>• Discussion about the video with the triggering questions "What does it mean to be someone in life?" "What does it mean to be professionally successful?" "Is anyone free to choose the profession they want?"</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> Research a profession or activity that each person wishes to follow, "which profession, what it is, what it does, areas of activity, market, skills, characteristics, motivation for this choice.</p>	<p>Questioning the concept of choice and rethinking social standards</p>
<p><b>4th Meeting - What happens after arrival</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-ENEM welcome</li> <li>• Sharing homework</li> <li>• Professions roleplay</li> <li>• Sentence completion technique</li> </ul>	<p>Post-test welcome. Reflecting on professional roles and motivations. Evaluate the group.</p>

Source: Devised by the authors

In the end, we received a total of twenty-seven applications, seventeen girls and ten boys, most of them black, residents of the city itself, but from different neighborhoods, children of local workers and with a similar socio-economic situation. All the meetings were facilitated by the psychologist in the school's computer room, which was the only room available at the time. The meetings were held in the last hour of the morning shift - 11:00 to 11:50 - the last two meetings were held in the library, and in all the meetings the mediating psychologist was responsible for conducting the meetings. It is worth remembering that at the end of each day, the information generated in each workshop was recorded in a field diary. For ethical reasons, we will use fictitious names when referring to any of the students.

### **Analysis of the experience of the "Building Paths" Project**

According to Campos, Silva and Albuquerque (2021) there are two main ways of analyzing an experience with a field diary. The first is to break down the data, checking for

patterns and regularities so that a theoretical analysis can then be carried out, which consists of explaining the research findings based on a theoretical scenario. In this case, we will break down the data in such a way as to explain how each meeting took place, theoretically discussing the elements pertinent to the objective of the work.

From what was experienced in the four meetings with the respective activities, it was possible to understand how young people in public high schools view this moment of career choice, as well as the different dimensions of this phenomenon. The activities carried out served as instruments capable of promoting reflection on life projects, as we will describe below.

### **First Meeting - The start of the journey**

The first meeting of the Building Paths project was entitled "The start of the journey", following the analogy of the project's title, which generates a sense of process and of building a life project. We understand that the students are active agents in this process, because according to Vygotsky (2003), man is an active being capable of transforming his reality and it is in interaction with other men that learning and development occur. This conception of man is important, because PO from a socio-historical perspective seeks to promote a space for critical reflection on the world of work and thereby promote a conscious choice of social issues, considering the autonomy of the subjects in this process (Silva *et al.*, 2021).

The first meeting was attended by 21 students from the school's two third years. We began with a presentation by the mediating psychologist, who introduced himself and said that he was a former student at the school and was currently a psychologist studying for a master's degree in psychology. During the presentation, the mediator's speech was cut short by the students asking questions such as "*how did you pass the ENEM? What was your grade? How did you study?*" (DC-1, our translation). These questions demonstrated the students' interest in entering higher education, despite the structural difficulty of public school students entering universities. It is possible to identify that there is a will and a desire, but the desire seems to come up against material issues, when one student mentions "*I don't think we'll ever get through either*" (DC-1, our translation). According to the analysis by Melsert and Bock (2015), poorer students tend to enter the job market earlier, often in precarious conditions, and consequently leave school earlier with little chance of accessing higher education, unlike wealthier students who dedicate themselves more to their studies and are able to access higher education more

easily. This reality can be questioned through a critical understanding of the social place they occupy, which is the one intended in the PB group.

We began by explaining what the Building Paths project was about with the question "do you know the difference between Professional Guidance and Life Project?" Few tried to answer, so the mediator chose to differentiate between Professional Guidance and Life Project, explaining that Professional Guidance is a systematic process with the aim of facilitating a process of professional choice, based on the social, political and cultural reality (Bock, 2006). The Life Project is a broader process and goes beyond the professional choice, it concerns plans, goals and desires for life (Alves; Dayrell, 2015).

We made a round of presentations collectively and at the end of the presentation we made a brief group contract about the importance of each person's commitment to the process, as well as agreeing on the days and times of each meeting (Soares; Krawulski, 2010). We then carried out a dynamic with the aim of reflecting on the reality in which they live. The reality called the "dynamics of the paths" took place as follows. Two drawings on A4 sheets of paper were displayed on the floor at a distance from each other, each at one end of the room. On the first, there was a drawing of a location icon symbolizing the starting point, and on the other there was a drawing of a flag symbolizing the finishing point. Each student was given a sheet of paper with a drawing of two feet, and was asked to first put on their feet what they saw as their potential. They were also told that they could color the feet however they wanted.

At the end of this stage, they were asked to write down the difficulties they saw on the way to the finish line and to organize themselves and place all the drawings on their feet, so that they connected to each other from the starting point to the finish point. At the end, it was discussed that the idea was to think about the activity and make connections with our own lives and contexts.

Some triggering questions mobilized the dialogue, such as: What did this activity mean to you? How did you feel doing this activity? Is it possible to leave the starting point and arrive at the end point with only potential? What is the importance of also learning to deal with weaknesses in search of what you want in life? The students then went on to say how they felt, pointing out that in order to achieve their goals they would need to deal with themselves completely, with everything that makes them up. This activity was important for mobilizing reflection on each person's context, understanding that this context can often hide a series of weaknesses that need to be analysed from a social point of view, and that's why the trigger questions were important. As Lisboa (2010) points out, socio-economic reality is a

preponderant factor in the professional and work scenario, and young people can often see the possibilities of developing a career as limited in the face of the social context. Reflecting on their weaknesses can be a way of understanding the social dimensions that run through the process of choosing a career.

## Second Meeting - Where to next?

Eleven students attended this meeting. We began with a dynamic called Who was I? Who am I? and Who will I be? There were three little cards, each with a different question - Who was I? Who am I? Who will I be? The student received the set of cards and could answer in any order they wanted, after which they would pass the cards on to the next student who would do the same. The aim was to articulate the past, present and future, reflecting on their identities, the social context in which they live, the current reality and how all this can influence the construction of the future. According to Dantas and Ciampa (2014), by talking about their life story, the subject enables the researcher to understand how they place themselves in the world, their values and their identity. According to the title of the meeting "where to go next", this moment was important for thinking about the possibilities of paths that can be built when reflecting on the future. According to Bock (2002), the self-perception of particular characteristics enhances the construction of life projects.

During the question "Who was I?" student Rafaela mentioned that she started her school career up to the 9th grade in a private school located in the same city, in high school Rafaela had to switch to public school, during the meeting Rafaela mentioned: *"This change was a shock for me. When I arrived, it seemed like they had stopped in time here. The structure was very different. But little by little my perception changed, today this school is my second home and my class is a family to me"* (DC-2, our translation). Arthur said: *"I never liked the private schools in Maracanaú, in the past I thought they were just playboys, today I see that they are normal people, just like us"* (DC-2, our translation). At this point, student Jéssica said *"nobody is better than anyone else, they're not better for studying in private schools, I even know some who are pirangueiros"* (DC-2, our translation) and the other students agreed with Jéssica's statement.

Rafaela and Arthur's accounts of comparisons between public and private schools show us that the students can see that there is a social difference between public and private school students. When Arthur says *"they are normal people"* (DC-2, our translation), this demonstrates

an attempt to naturalize the social abyss that exists between them. According to Melsert and Bock (2015), poor young people can see the social difference in relation to others, however, they do not present critical elements that explain this social reality. This is why, during the activity, the psychologist posed questions that mediated a reflective process on the topic being discussed.

Another point that came up in the students' speeches in this activity was the difficulty of keeping up with their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic, Rafaela said: "*I learned practically nothing*". Another student said: "*the school was out of classes for practically the whole year*" (DC-2, our translation). They explained that when they arrived at the school in the 1st year of high school, a few months later the pandemic began, and when they were able to return to school again in person, they were already in the 3rd year of high school, that is, in their final year. The students reported that they felt like they had jumped from 9th grade to 3rd grade and that the first years of high school never seemed to exist, a situation that aggravated the learning process. Some of the students reported that they were able to do work during class time "*the school couldn't fail us anyway*" (DC-2, our translation). According to Santos and Oliveira (2021), the pandemic has weakened the students' bond with the school and the teachers, and the loss of this bond has led to losses for the students who have withdrawn from school. It also made it difficult for students to build life projects, as it was a period of doubt and uncertainty about the future in the face of the COVID-19 virus.

During the question "Who will I be?" some of the students said they wanted to study psychology, and the mediator asked them what motivated them to choose this course. Amanda replied: "*Many students at school suffer from anxiety attacks, sometimes we go to the bathroom and there's someone in crisis and we have to take them in because there's no psychologist at school*" (DC-2, our translation). At this point, the mediator asked them what they did to help, and they said that they stayed by their side until the person got better. The desire to study psychology was to know how to act in these situations. Another student said that sometimes when a student is having a crisis at school, they call the sign language teacher. When asked why they call her, she said "*ah, it's because she has a way, you know, she's a good person*" (DC-2, our translation).

When asked by the mediator how he would do this, Pedro said that he had signed up for the army and was taking the tests to pass. He said that he would do anything to achieve his goal, adding that "*I've never had anyone for me, so I signed up, went there and passed.*" (DC-2, our translation). When asked about the means to achieve these goals, only Pedro was able to

answer, Amanda at first showed insecurity about the means to achieve the goal of studying Psychology, according to her depending on a test score generates a lot of uncertainty, but explained that if she did not pass this year, she would take a preparatory course to pass the entrance exam.

With this activity - Who am I? Who was I? Who will I be? - it was possible to start problematizing life plans and career choices, since the question "who will I be?" allowed the teenagers to project a possible future. At this stage, the mediator chose to ask questions such as "When you finish high school, what do you want to do? If you want to continue studying, where will you study? Which course(s)?" Those who want to enter the job market will be looking for what kind of work. Some said they wanted to go on to higher education and others mentioned the desire for a job that would pay quickly.

After this, the mediator put trigger questions on the board and pointed out that this would be a kind of round table discussion about the reality of work. The trigger questions were "What are the characteristics of the world of work today?" "What are the difficulties of entering the job market?" "How do you plan to enter the world of work?". The idea of systematizing these questions was to lead to a reflection on the current world of work, and there was active participation from the students at this point, who problematized how they understood the job market.

At this stage of the problematization of the job market, all the students replied that they were interested in entering the job market the year after they finished high school. The psychologist asked them how they would achieve this. Gradually, the students came up with concrete answers. They mentioned the difficulty of entering the job market, talked about rising unemployment and people with a lot of knowledge working as app drivers.

### **Third Meeting - Between the curves**

At this meeting, we started with a video called "Life Choices", a short film that allowed us to reflect on the dimension of work and how professional choices are crossed by the social context. The video mobilized a discussion about doing what you like or doing something that has more financial return; it also made it possible to think about what the subject does well and the possibilities of execution, the means to achieve the individual objective and the reward that choices can generate. It is worth remembering that the analysis of an audiovisual resource in a group can encourage critical reflection on social reality (Klein; Arantes, 2016). We then began

a discussion about the video with the trigger questions "What does it mean to be someone in life? What does it mean to be personally and professionally successful? Is anyone free to choose the profession they want? What factors can influence professional choice?"

The video and the questions enabled the students to talk about the social context, understanding the social structures surrounding the world of work. They began by talking about their socio-economic situation and the difficulties they faced as a result of being poor and studying in public schools. There was a discussion about quotas in universities and the students showed support for this policy and confirmed how important it has been for getting students into universities.

One student said: "*You don't have to go to university to be someone in life*" (DC-3, our translation). This is a central point in the construction of a life project, because the professional future does not necessarily depend on university. We know that it goes beyond work, it permeates life as a whole. Many students mentioned the situation of their parents who were unable to go to university but managed to work in a dignified way.

Finally, they were given an activity to do at home. They were asked to research the profession or job they imagined themselves doing in the future, asking questions such as "What is the profession/occupation? What does it do? Areas of activity, market, skills, characteristics, motivation for this choice." The aim of the activity was to understand the motivations behind the choice and the characteristics of that particular area. Nine students attended this meeting.

#### **Fourth Meeting - What happens after arrival**

At this last meeting, we first had a post-ENEM welcome. Six students were present. The first phase of the exam had taken place the day before and upon arriving at the school they realized how distressed and anguished they were about the test. Some of them had taken the exam for the first time and, despite the mock exams, reported that they had been taken by surprise by the long format of the exam. During the reception, the students very emphatically pointed out that they could have done more mock exams and that they thought the school had started focusing on ENEM at very short notice, as they were focused on the content for the partial and bimonthly exams. They also reported episodes of anxiety during the exam.

This was followed by a presentation and discussion of the previous homework assignment. Each student presented characteristics of the professions they wanted to pursue, including psychology, physiotherapy, nursing, policing, working in the financial market, etc.

During the presentations, the mediator raised pertinent questions, such as "what motivated this choice? Does this profession require a university degree? What are the ways to get into this field?". As a result, the students themselves also became interested in asking questions about each other's professions and occupations.

Next, a simulation of the professions was carried out, an activity known from the English term role play where each person would play a character as if they were working in the market and the audience - students and mediator - would ask questions about the professions. It was a very relaxed moment that allowed them to think about what it would be like to work in a certain area, the simulation having the function of helping. The technique of complementing sentences was also used, with the aim of investigating the meanings produced by the students on certain topics.

### **Professional guidance in the mediation of life projects in public schools**

Vocational guidance from a socio-historical perspective can serve as a mediator in the construction of life projects, as it allows participants to reflect on the dimension of their reality in the social context. In this way, an important aspect in the development of the Building Paths Project was its mediating aspect. We understand mediation from the perspective of Vygotsky (2003), who states that the process of mediation is central to the ontogenetic constitution of man, in other words, the historical constitution of man. It was through mediation that man developed the ability to internalize the meaning of things. Leontiev (1978) also points out that what differentiates man's history is the capacity to appropriate the historical experience accumulated by humanity, and this experience is mainly in physical objects, language and material culture, which is internalized through mediation. According to Farias and Bortolanza (2013), the mediation of other people is essential in the process of internalizing culture and developing language.

In this way, learning and human development take place through the mediation of instruments and signs, which assume an intermediary position in a relationship. For Vygotsky (2003), every human relationship presupposes mediation; we become human through others, which denotes what can be understood as mediation. In this way, every acquisition of knowledge is mediated by some physical or symbolic tool, it is in this process that the world acquires meaning, which is why the author highlights mediation as a fundamental element in the process of human development and learning.

With this in mind, we highlight that the activities carried out at each meeting were mediators in the process of building life projects for the public school students, as they enabled them to think about other important elements in this construction. According to Silva *et al.* (2021), professional guidance can provide a space for adolescents to reflect beyond their professional lives, expanding to issues of personal life, their life history, their reality and helping them to build life projects.

According to Melsert and Bock (2015), in Brazil there is a legitimization of social inequality based on a meritocratic discourse based on a liberal logic that wants to justify success and failure from an individual point of view, removing their social production from the axis of analysis. The experience of public school and poverty, according to Melsert and Bock (2015), constitutes subjectivities. A person who has access to social goods and services is subjected to this reality, as is a person who is deprived of all this. For this reason, Whitaker (2010) says that it is necessary to become aware of and critically reflect on the structural causes of the difficulties faced by students from public schools, and that this is part of the process of building a life project.

With this, it was possible to understand that public school students need these spaces for collective and critical discussion and construction about social reality and work, so that the construction of life projects in public schools becomes a practice and an instrument for social transformation. The answers provided by the students at first seemed to be answers without in-depth critical reflection, but as we problematized them with triggered questions, we could see their ability to formulate critically about social reality and work. According to Carvalho and Marinho-Araújo (2010), the mediation of adolescents' career choices has been one of the most challenging tasks for psychologists in schools, as this work is still not very widespread, especially in public schools, where psychologists are still not very present. Whitaker (2010) points out that guidance needs to be expanded as an affirmative action for public school students.

## **Final considerations**

Career guidance can be an instrument capable of mediating the construction of life projects, to the extent that it provides those involved with a critical reflection on reality, the social context and the world of work. In public schools in particular, where the majority of students are socially vulnerable, a practice committed to social transformation is necessary, promoting a space for critical reflection on the social context. The historical, social and cultural aspects in which the subjects are involved influence the process of choosing a career, and consequently the construction of life projects, as well as influencing adherence to the group proposed at the school, in which students dropped out during the course of the meetings. It was also noticed that more girls than boys joined the group, which is something worth discussing in a future study.

The students' life plans are generally linked to their career choice, with most of them associating their life plans with going to university or entering the job market. Through the meetings of the "Building Paths" project, the students were able to reflect not only on themselves, but also on the social dimension, thinking critically about the school, which sometimes appears as a space they call their "second home" and sometimes establishes a critical reflection on the way it works, in which mediation through the instruments made it possible to broaden the reflection on the structural issues of society and we emphasize professional orientation as a practice to be exercised within this space capable of enabling and facilitating the construction of life projects with the students.

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