

# SELF-NARRATIVES IN (AUTO) BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH WITH YOUTH

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to present the contributions and specificities of self-narratives for studies with young people in the field of Education, based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of (auto)biographical research. This text, without aiming to cover all the dimensions of narrative-based studies, focuses on how self-narrative is conceived and used in studies involving young people, as discussed by two leading authors in the field of Sociology of Youth in Brazil: Pais (2001), a Portuguese social scientist, and Feixa (2018), a Spanish social anthropologist. The investigation also includes research conducted from the perspective of (auto)biographical research, according to the French researcher Delory-Momberger (2012; 2014; 2021; 2022), the Brazilian researcher Souza (2006; 2014) and the Brazilian researcher Passeggi (2020; 2021). The text also highlights questions raised during the analysis of a biographical research interview with a young Pedagogy student concerning the challenges of the first year. Furthermore, it discusses the approaches of using narratives in youth studies and (auto)biographical research, particularly the specific ways self-narratives are conceived in studies involving young people. For the (auto)biographical research, the production of narratives by young people does not aim to collect data, but serves as an intensifier of reflective spaces, which can facilitate both self-development processes and the generation of knowledge for research.

**Keywords:** (Auto)biographical research. Self-narratives. Sociology of Youth. Youths.

## RESUMO

### NARRATIVAS DE SI NA PESQUISA (AUTO)BIOGRÁFICA COM AS JUVENTUDES

O objetivo é apresentar as contribuições e especificidades das narrativas de si, para os estudos com as juventudes no campo

da Educação, a partir dos pressupostos teóricos e metodológicos da pesquisa (auto)biográfica. Sem a pretensão de abarcar todas as dimensões das múltiplas vertentes de estudos com as narrativas, neste texto focaliza-se como a narrativa de si é concebida e utilizada nos estudos com jovens por dois autores que são referência para a Sociologia da Juventude no Brasil. São eles: Pais (2001), cientista social português, e Feixa (2018), antropólogo social espanhol; como aquelas desenvolvidas na perspectiva da pesquisa (auto)biográfica, conforme a pesquisadora francesa Delory-Momberger (2012; 2014; 2021; 2022), o pesquisador brasileiro Souza (2006; 2014) e a pesquisadora brasileira Passeggi (2020; 2021). Evidenciam-se, também, questões suscitadas na análise de uma entrevista de pesquisa biográfica, com uma jovem estudante de Pedagogia, sobre os desafios do primeiro ano. Para além das aproximações no uso das narrativas para o campo do estudo da juventude e da pesquisa (auto)biográfica, são evidenciadas as especificidades dos modos de conceber as narrativas de si nos estudos com os(as) jovens para esta última. Para a pesquisa (auto)biográfica, a produção das narrativas pelos(as) jovens não visa à obtenção de dados, mas configura-se como potencializadora de espaços de reflexividade, que podem produzir, tanto processos de formação de si, como conhecimentos para a pesquisa.

**Palavras-chave:** Pesquisa (auto)biográfica. Narrativas de si. Sociologia da Juventude. Juventudes.

## RESUMEN **NARRATIVA DEL YO EN LA INVESTIGACIÓN (AUTO)BI- OGRÁFICA CON JÓVENES**

El objetivo de este estudio es presentar las contribuciones y particularidades de las autonarrativas para estudios con jóvenes en el campo de la Educación, basado en los supuestos teóricos y metodológicos de la investigación (auto)biográfica. Este texto, sin pretender abarcar todas las dimensiones de los estudios basados en narrativas, se centra en cómo la autonarrativa es concebida y utilizada en estudios que involucran a jóvenes, tal como lo discuten dos autores destacados en el campo de la Sociología de la Juventud en Brasil: Pais (2001), un científico social portugués, y Feixa (2018), un antropólogo social español. La investigación también incluye estudios realizados desde la perspectiva de la investigación (auto)biográfica, según la investigadora francesa Delory-Momberger (2012; 2014; 2021;

2022), el investigador brasileño Souza (2006; 2014) y la investigadora brasileña Passeggi (2020; 2021). El texto también destaca las cuestiones planteadas durante el análisis de una entrevista de investigación biográfica con una estudiante joven de Pedagogía sobre los desafíos del primer año. Además, discute los enfoques de uso de narrativas en estudios juveniles y en la investigación (auto)biográfica, particularmente las maneras específicas en que las autonarrativas son concebidas en estudios que involucran a jóvenes. Para la investigación (auto)biográfica, la producción de narrativas por parte de los jóvenes no tiene como objetivo la recolección de datos, sino que sirve como intensificador de espacios reflexivos, lo cual puede facilitar tanto los procesos de desarrollo personal como la generación de conocimiento para la investigación.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación (auto)biográfica. Narrativa del yo. Sociología de la Juventud. Jóvenes.

## Introduction

In this article, we explore the contributions of self-narratives to youth studies in the field of Education, based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of (auto)biographical research in dialogue with the assumptions of the Sociology of Youth<sup>1</sup>. We emphasize the importance of clearly defining the theoretical and methodological specificities of (auto)biographical research within the context of studies involving youth narratives.

This text does not attempt to encompass all dimensions of the multiple aspects of narra-

tive studies<sup>2</sup> in these two fields of study, the text focuses on self-narrative as research and formation, especially in studies with youths, based on the following questions: which would be the proximity between the use of narratives within the studies of Sociology of Youth and (auto)biographical research, and what would be the specificities of self-narratives in (auto)biographical research?

To address self-narratives, we resorted to studies by Delory-Momberger and Kondratiuk (2021), Delory-Momberger (2022), Souza (2014, 2006) and Passeggi (2020, 2021). Regarding the use of self-narratives with youths, we focused on the interview by Delory-Momberger and Melin (Reis; Alves, 2018), with an emphasis on the assumptions of the biographical research interview in education. We also present the biographical focuses from the interviews, as life histories, according to two reference authors

1 This article, conducted under the "GPEJUV-UFAL" research group (Youth, Cultures and Formation Research Group), presents results from the studies: "Biographical research, youth and mobilization for learning" (2019-2022), approved under the Universal Notice (nº439558/2018-2), and as a CNPq scholarship and its continuation with the study "Meanings of experiences carried out in university life for self-development and the relationship with teaching young people/students" (nº 316126/2021-7). This latter also received a CNPq scholarship and financial support from the FAPEAL Notice No. 003/2022 – Research Assistance - Humanities: Human Sciences; Social and Applied Sciences, and as a CNPq productivity project (2022-2025).

2 Among these aspects, for example, the "narrative interview" Fritz Shütze (2011) stands out; Sandra Jovchlovitch and Martin Bauer (2008).

for the studies of Sociology of Youth in Brazil: Machado Pais (2001), a Portuguese social scientist, and Carles Feixa (2018), a Spanish social anthropologist.

Next, some aspects of the analysis of the interview of a biographical research with a young Pedagogy student are presented. The interview focused on the challenges of young Pedagogy students in their first years at university to highlight the potential of this type of interview for studies with youths.

### Notes on narratives as a research procedure in studies with youths

The Sociology of Youth, with which we establish dialogue, has sought to deconstruct homogenizing representations of youth as a phase of life, as deviant, as immature, as a cultural model, and proposes that the youth category is socially constructed.

According to Feixa (1999), this category became significant during modernity, coinciding with the European industrialization process. In this context, it is understood as a preparatory phase and moment for adult life, termed a 'moratorium' (Abramo, 2008; Margulis; Urresti, 1996); conceiving the young person as unprepared and as a "becoming".

As Dayrell (2003, p. 41) explains, the notion of social moratorium produces the idea of youth as "[...] a time for trial and error, for experimentation, a period marked by hedonism and irresponsibility, with a relativization of the application of sanctions on juvenile behavior". Conversely, as Margulis and Urestis (1996) point out, such a moratorium is not possible for poor young people, who do not have the time and money to live life and prepare themselves unworried.

The term "youths" is used "[...] in the plural, to emphasize the diversity of existing ways of being young" (Dayrell, 2003, p. 42). Epistemological principles that guide research, forma-

tion processes or policies that do not value the understanding of young people as plural and their modes of expression are questioned. As Margulis and Urestis (1996) explain, such homogenizing principles do not allow analyzing the possibilities and impossibilities of youth living, based on their youthful condition, the markers of class, race, gender, among others. Pais (2003) emphasizes that it is important to consider how young people attribute meaning "[...] to what they say and what they do and, in this way, connect expressed intentions with the contexts in which these intentions are produced" (2003, p. 396). The author advocates carrying out research with young people in their daily lives and, to this end, favors studies with narratives, which the author denominates "life histories".

It is worth highlighting that both for studies with narratives in (auto)biographical research and for the Sociology of Youth, an important milestone is the contribution of research carried out by the Chicago School. According to Delory-Momberger (2014a), the great historical milestones: the Chicago School, in the United States (between 1915 and 1935) and the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology can be pointed out as the origin of the use of narratives and other personal documents, letters, diaries and photographs, as resources for research<sup>3</sup>.

The Chicago School, a research strand, emerged within the department of Sociology

<sup>3</sup> In her work, Delory-Momberger (2014a) also mentions important contributions from Herbert Blumer, who dedicated to symbolic interactionism, and highlights the importance the researcher understands the interpretation given by the actor, and Alfred Schütz, linked to social phenomenology and ethnomethodology. Both authors demonstrated the capacity of language to construct an understanding of social reality, as they emphasized studies with subjects about their ways of interpreting the social world. And as a CNPq productivity project (2022-2025), the paper "(Auto)biographical research and youth: theoretical and methodological fields in dialogue" was presented at the National Symposium (Axis III - X CIPA/2024)

and Anthropology at the University of Chicago. They assumed that the knowledge produced by sociologists, based on field research, should bring solutions to urban problems that were being experienced, such as violence, delinquency, prostitution, especially by immigrants and black people, considered segregated from society (Delory-Momberger, 2014a). In general, “field studies shared the characteristic of searching in the very words of social actors, the most appropriate materials for understanding social reality” (Delory-Momberger, 2014a, p. 243)<sup>4</sup>. These studies valued materials that could present life narratives, such as letters and biographical writings, to capture a recomposed past that was both individual and social (Delory-Momberger, 2014a)<sup>5</sup>.

Delory-Momberger (2014a, p. 253) points out, however, that “[...] life narratives, despite the emblematic value they could represent for the Chicago School, constituted [...] just an annex document, associated to other types of personal documents”, used to reinforce pre-conceived theories and analyses.

It is noteworthy that in the field of Sociology, qualitative research developed by researchers from the Chicago School is highly valued. However, there is criticism regarding studies on youth conducted within this theoretical framework, as they reinforce the idea of youth as deviant. Carles Feixa (1999), for example, highlights that such studies are important because they are the first to seek to understand youth groups through empirical observation, but adds that the Chicago School authors, as they are situated “[...] in the reformist tradition of liberals in the United States, were more concerned with finding solutions to the anomie prevailing in the suburbs, through socializing measures and more effective instruments of

social control” (Feixa, 1999, p. 52). Thus, according to the author, this type of study contributes to legitimizing a conception of youth, especially in relation to poor and young black people, as “social problems”.

Generally, from the 1930s to the 1950s, there was a noticeable decline in qualitative research and a delegitimization of studies with a biographical focus. This is the period when quantitative research predominates, using statistical data and questionnaires in the field of Social Sciences research. Passeggi (2020) emphasizes the importance of the “biographical turn” in the 1980s in the Social Sciences, which began to legitimize narratives as a research method and technique. The author even considers that the Italian researcher Franco Ferrarotti has been responsible, since the 1950s, for the resurgence of the personal narrative modality and for criticizing the traditional use of life histories in Sociology.

Christine Josso (2004, p. 20) states that “the rehabilitation of the biographical perspective can be interpreted as a return of the pendulum after the hegemony of the deterministic causality model of the functionalist, Marxist and structuralist conceptions of the individual, which dominated until the late 1970s.”

It is interesting to note that contemporary authors, such as Carles Feixa and Machado Pais who conduct research in the field of youth with narratives produced by young people, also have Franco Ferrarotti’s studies as a reference.

## The autobiographical-narrative paradigm in the field of Education

A synthesis of the panorama of the biographical paradigm in education is outlined by Passeggi (2020), based on three approaches. One strand, according to the author, is the movement of life histories in adult education, an approach that emerged in the 1980s in Europe (France,

4 All translated texts in this article are free translations by the author.

5 See also: Souza: Meirelles (2018).

Belgium, Switzerland, and Portugal) and North America (Canada). This approach, which focuses on continuing education for adults, was institutionalized in the 1970s (Passeggi, 2020). This movement focuses on education research, considering the research process as formative. Social actors reflect on their life path and research their experience. Some important references to this movement are: Pineau (2005); Dominicé (2000); Josso (2010); and Passeggi (2016). The focus of life history in education differs from those used in other sciences, whether for those that focus on “[...] the (re) construction of historical events (Oral History), or for the understanding of phenomena, social or cultural attitudes (Sociology, Social Psychology, Anthropology)” (Passeggi, 2020, p. 62).

According to Passeggi (2020), another epistemological approach is biographical research in Education or “Recherche biographique en Éducation”, proposed by Delory-Momberger, in France, in the early 2000s. She explains that Christine Delory-Momberger carries out work to delimit biographical research in Education as an “[...] aspect of qualitative research, a biographical pedagogy or a biographical paradigm, in the elaboration of a theoretical and conceptual framework to translate the anthropological capacity through which humans perceive and organize their lives in terms of a narrative reason” (Passeggi, 2020, p. 64). Regarding the development of research with a biographical focus in Brazil, Passeggi (2020) presents the approach (auto)biographical research. She explains that from the 1990s onwards, Antônio Nóvoa’s book, *As histórias de vida em formação*, has significantly influenced Brazilian research, promoting studies, mainly in the field of teacher training.

The work developed by the coordinators of the Teaching, Memory and Gender Group (GEDOMGE), at the Faculty of Education at São Paulo University (Feusp) is an example of this

process. Created in 1994, they have been inspired by the studies by Gaston Pineau, Pierre Dominicé, Marie-Christine Josso, developed at the University of Geneva, with a wide network of researchers from other countries. Belmira Bueno, Cynthia Sousa, Helena Chamlian and Denice Catani (2006, p. 392) explain that the group has used the (auto)biographical method in a “[...] double perspective: to operate as a formation device and, at the same time, as a research instrument”.

Passeggi (2020) highlights that the (auto) biographical research approach in Brazil is legitimized “[...] during the first International Congress of (Auto)Biographical Research (I CIPA, Porto Alegre), organized by Maria Helena Menna-Barreto Abrahão (Abrahão, 2004), who brought together researchers from Europe, Canada, Asia, the United States of America and Brazil around the biographical and auto-biographical” (Passeggi, 2020, p. 64). She adds that CIPA constitutes an “[...] inaugural landmark and a forum for debate on the biographical movement in Brazil, which began to count on the leadership of Elizeu Clementino de Souza, in 2006, when he held the II CIPA in Salvador” (Passeggi, 2020, p. 64).

The author recognizes that, currently, there is a theoretical convergence among the three approaches, with their nuances in relation to the supports for the production of narratives, which, when focused on interviews, are conventionally denominated biographical and for written narratives, (auto)biographical (Passeggi, 2016). In this regard, one of the fundamental concepts of this approach is that of research-formation, where the hyphen between the two terms conveys the inseparable nature of formation from investigative reflection (Pineau, 2005; Dominicé, 2000; Josso, 2010; Passeggi, 2016).

Passeggi (2020) identifies advances in the biographical paradigm by considering the epistemological specificity of the self-narrative as

a formation practice, providing a different form of knowledge production in education.

In relation to (auto)biographical research in the study of youths, we highlight the interview with Delory-Momberger and Valérie Melin (Reis; Alves, 2018) for the dossier: “Education and youths: contributions of biographical research in contemporary society”. Delory-Momberger explains that biographical research “is the means to explore the forms and meanings of individual biographical constructions in their socio-historical inscriptions” and that it is also inserted “[...] at the intersection of numerous disciplinary fields of human and social sciences: anthropology, history, sociology, psychology, but also in educational sciences, literature, philosophy” (Reis; Alves, 2018, p. 1). Delory-Momberger shares with Ferrarotti the assumption that individuals carry out a “singular re-appropriation of the social and historical universal that surrounds them because they filter, interpret, interfere with themselves by projecting them into another dimension, that of subjectivity” (Ferrarotti, 2014, p. 58), constantly reinventing themselves as subjects.

Valérie Melin reiterates that such research interrogates and critically questions “[...] a certain conception of youth as a homogeneous collective, inseparable from ideological, contestable backgrounds, which tend to signify young people based on categories that amalgamate and subject them to the social determinations in which they are inserted” (Reis; Alves, 2018, p. 7). For Valérie Melin, biographical research, “[...] aims at a hermeneutic, interpretative dimension of experiences, and, consequently, [allows us to grasp] the meaning that individuals and, in this context, young people, propose, through the narrative procedure of their existence” (Reis; Alves, 2018, p. 7).

It is noteworthy that the specificity of (auto)biographical research is conducting studies based on self-narratives, as a reflexive work

to produce meanings about what has been experienced. These narratives can be produced through individual interviews, in groups, with written productions, images, etc. Souza and Meireles (2018) emphasize that when narrating personal and collective experiences, subjects develop knowledge about themselves and their social worlds, enabling the construction of unique knowledge through their experiences.

Delory-Momberger and Kondratiuk (2022), using Ricoeur’s assumptions as reference, explain that narrative production is composed of the operations of selection, organization and synthesis. According to the authors, individuals who narrate select events from memory, which then gain meaning within the overall narrated history, due to their temporal sequencing. This process unfolds due to the purpose of the intended narrative, the objective to be achieved, as a “weaving of the plot”. This allows for the production of the narrative’s hermeneutic composition, which is a synthetic construction of the heterogeneous elements, in which the meaning of what is intended to be communicated is constructed.

Therefore, Delory-Momberger and Kondratiuk (2022) emphasize that reading and interpreting the narrative give access to this fabrication of forms and meaning or, in other words, the study of biographization processes. Delory-Momberger (2016) explains that biographization operations are processes in which each person uses cultural and social languages to carry out “[...] the set of operations and behaviors through which individuals work to give themselves their own form in which they recognize themselves and are recognized by others. (Delory-Momberger, 2016, p. 139).

In (auto)biographical research, we reflect on different dimensions of what we have experienced, through the mediation of language. In this process, the immediate experience passes through the experience we carry out through

the narrative production (Delory-Momberger, 2019), providing experiential resources. This process is explained by Alfred Schütz as the “biography of experience”. According to Schütz (1979), what we experience can, for example, be identified as an experience we have had or modified, or even an experience of a similar type, which allows us to broaden our biography of the experience. The experience can be experienced as strange, if it does not refer to anything similar in relation to the previous experience, producing strangeness and greater work in the attempt to give meaning to what was experienced (Schütz, 1979). In this way, the acquired experiences are “biographical resources” that organize and structure the perception of the world.

Studies with self-narratives therefore produce knowledge about research questions, by providing a better understanding of the articulations between different knowledge, experiences, reasons for engaging in certain forms of learning; according to Delory-Momberger (2014b), it is the place where biographical learning is produced. In this way, self-narrative, based on (auto)biographical research, is not configured as a technique for obtaining data, but rather as a place of learning for the researcher and study participants.

## Narratives with young people in the studies by Carles Feixa and Machado Pais: reference researchers for the Sociology of Youth in Brazil<sup>6</sup>

Next, we briefly turn to the studies *La imagina-*

*ción autobiográfica: las historias de vida como herramienta de investigación*, by the Spanish author Carles Feixa (2018b) and “Ganchos, Tachos e Biscates. Jovens, Trabalho e Futuro”, by Machado Pais (2001), authors who are a reference for the Sociology of Youth in Brazil, to identify how they conceive the use of young people’s narratives to produce knowledge about their research themes.

## Life histories (self-narratives) by Carles Feixa

Carles Feixa Pampols is a professor of Social Anthropology at Pompeu Fabra University, in Barcelona, PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Barcelona and Doctor *Honoris Causa* at the University of Manizales (Colombia). He is internationally recognized as a scholar of youth cultures.

In his research, the author uses interviews with young people as one of the procedures, using oral history as reference, denominated life histories. In an interview given to Oliveira et al. (2018a), the author explains: “I have always prioritized a particular technique which is life histories. I have always worked on and continue to work on, I have converted it into my main point of view, without discarding other methodologies and other techniques” (Oliveira et al., 2018a, p. 320). Feixa also highlights his conception of studies with young people and his methodology. He emphasizes that talking to young people is not enough, it is also necessary to research their social environment (parents, teachers, police, the media, etc.). “It is necessary to consider the context in which they are inserted, because, deep down, youth is not studied by studying only young people, but rather their media, political and social context” (Oliveira et al., 2018a, p. 321).

We have identified some aspects about how the author uses life histories in his re-

<sup>6</sup> The preliminary study on the conceptions of youth narrative research for Machado Pais and Carles Feixa, was carried out within the scope of scientific initiation research, with a work plan by Laura Santos de Oliveira and published in the proceedings of the X International Pedagogy Week (Ufal), titled: “Life histories in Machado Pais’ and Carles Feixa’s research: contributions to studies with youth” (Oliveira; Reis, 2022).



search, from the texts published in the book *La imaginación autobiográfica: las historias de vida como herramienta de investigación*, which contains texts produced by the author over his 30 years as a researcher. Feixa conceptualizes biographical imagination as “[...] the creativity practiced by anthropologists, sociologists, historians and literati in search for new ways of communicating the words of life that informants, belonging to different social groups, offer” (Feixa, 2018b, p.14)

The book contains texts he has written for 30 years. He explains that, in this book, in his research, he has always worked with the procedure of “life histories”, without discarding others. An important reference for the author is oral history. He argues that life histories are constructions created during research, as a process of interaction and dialogue between researcher and study participant. He also states that the interview is not a neutral technique (Feixa, 2018b, p. 73). For the author, it involves communication, reciprocity, and affection, constituting an interactive praxis (Feixa, 2018b). It is, therefore, about creating a space of trust.

In one chapter, the author addresses the findings of his doctoral dissertation. He had researched the youth of a hundred men and women who lived in the city of Lleida, since the Spanish Civil War, from 1936 to 1989 <sup>7</sup>. He comments that after explaining the objective of the interview, presenting the declaration of commitment to anonymity, he asked a generic question, with few interventions. He intended to conduct several interviews with the same participants, but it was impossible.

Franco Ferrarotti is interviewed in the last

<sup>7</sup> In chapter 2, Carles Feixa “reports his experience during his doctoral research, carried out with men and women who had lived their youth in the city of Lleida since the Spanish civil war from 1936 to 1989. [...] 86 interviews were conducted with 110 participated informants, which resulted in 175 recorded tapes and 1205 pages of transcription (Oliveira: Reis, 2022, p. 8)

chapter of the book, and the author’s assumptions are used by Feixa. Among them, the perspective that it is possible to “read a society through a biography” with the reports produced by young people (Ferrarotti, 2010, p. 45). Feixa also agrees with the author’s premise that the researcher has to be an analyst and involved actor, participant and capable of maintaining a critical distance. In the interview given to Feixa, the Italian author reinforces that the life history is an act of interaction, analysis, temporalization and contextualization, using complementary sources.

Feixa also states that the transcription of the interviews is the researcher’s first translation, and it is necessary to respect the content and tone of the oral language. He argues that, after the transcription, he reads and searches for themes and episodes for analysis.

It is possible to identify approximations of his assumptions about research with young people and (auto)biographical research: the need to build a space of trust, interaction and involvement of the researcher. Regarding the relationship between life history and youth, Feixa explains that

[...] youth do not have a life history or biography because they would still be under construction, on the other hand, I realized that it was precisely the moment when they could begin to narrate and construct, based on the questions I asked as an anthropologist and researcher, [...] It was a possibility to give them the option of narrating themselves, of seeking the content of their identities. It is a technique I continue to apply and believe to be classic in social sciences, in the case of youth, it remains relevant, as it enables not only capturing a lot of experienced information, but above all personalizing a narrative of the young people themselves, of the subjects themselves (Oliveira et al, 2018a, p. 320).

We share the author’s idea that conducting interviews with young people’s life histories allows them to participate in a reflective process

about themselves and in relation to the study of the environment they are inserted.

However, we would like to qualify the assertion that young people lack history. According to (auto)biographical research, the narrative does not refer to recalling a life history and, therefore, for (auto)biographical research, there is no point in questioning whether or not the young person has a life history previous to the interview. While it is true that young people represent individuals who have a life ahead of them and a lot of stories to tell, the focus is not on recalling a history from the past, from someone at the end of the journey. The aim is to build a space for reflexivity, with young people, based on current issues, where young people can narrate about their experiences, articulating, re-signifying and configuring the experiences and knowledge learned in different social spaces.

(Auto)biographical research is interested in studying the narrative as a work of reconfiguring what is experienced by the research participant, a process denominated biographization by Christine Delory-Momberger. Delory-Momberger (2014b) explains that “biographization” is the work of each subject to give shape to what they have experienced, based on the interpretations and meaning attributed to experiences. This process allows the participant to construct narrative research with meaning for themselves and to be communicated to others, based on the reconfiguration of fragments of what has been experienced. For (auto)biographical research, the narrative does not present a history of the past, but rather it is a work of constructing meaning in the present, based on the reframing of fragments of what has been experienced.

## Life histories by Machado Pais

Portuguese social scientist José Machado Pais began his studies with young people in the

1980s. In his research, the author proposes, as a methodological path, the study of young people’s daily lives, which, for him, means “mapping the social, in their everyday details”, to understand the enigmas of the present, which contemplates temporality, with a view to understanding their historicity. He states that the study with young people from this perspective aims to “explore everyday life as a field of imaginary production, of creativity” (Pais, 2017, p. 308). For him, everyday life is a methodological tool. It is not only routine, but it is also the stage for “resistance and social struggles”.

The author starts from the theoretical-methodological assumption that “in the micro we find apparently insignificant details that are actually powerful for understanding the macro” (Pais, 2019, p. 413) and therefore, he advocates mapping the social. He adds that there is “a certain charm for biographical approaches” (Pais, 2019, p. 413), because they allow social structures and biographical trajectories to be articulated, enabling to read the social through a life history (Ferrarotti, 2010).

He argues that to analyze the transition processes of youth to adulthood, it is imperative “to interweave biographical choices and social structures” (Pais; Lacerda; Oliveira, 2017, p. 305), as the latter are the basis on which they carry out life trajectories and biographical choices. He adds that the social condition of young people, regarding their income class, greatly influences their biographical choices.

To approximate to how Pais appropriates the biographical approach, we present some aspects of the use of reports with young people in the book *Ganchos, tachos e biscates. Jovens, trabalho e futuro* (2001)<sup>8</sup>. In this book, the

8 This book “is divided into two large parts: *Encruzilhadas* and *Fazer pela vida* (Crossroads and Doing for Life). The first part, subdivided into five parts, presents the theoretical and methodological aspects of the research, the second part includes nine reports of young people’s lives (cases), followed by the conclusion” (Oliveira; Reis, 2022, p. 5). Thus, in the second

author conducts qualitative research, which he denominates a cartography of the precariousness of young workers.

According to the author, his object of study in this book is the discovery of “life worlds”, conceived in the sense used by Alfred Schütz, of young people looking for various ways of entering the world of work or inventive ways of earning money. A total of 14 in-depth interviews, denominated life histories and analyzed as case studies, are carried out with young Portuguese people aged close to 30.

According to Pais (2001), this study aims to break with a linear, homogeneous and continuous perspective of appropriation of the biographical approach. He considers the life reports as constructions, based on the analytical work of young people in relation to their memories.

He uses Alfred Schütz (1979) to explain that here and now not only shape the experience of the present, but also shape the way we interpret past experiences, which are incorporated into our body of knowledge. Alfred Schütz (1979, p. 74) highlights that, in everyday life, subjects have, “[...] at any moment, a stock of knowledge at hand that serves as a code of interpretations of their past and present experiences and also determines their anticipation of things to come.”

In the analysis of life reports, Pais (2001) has as a reference the idea of motive, evoked by Alfred Schütz (1979), which refers both to the objective of the action and to the subjective world of the subject who idealizes the action.

What is at stake in the use of the biographical method, according to the author, is the recall of memories narrated from the point of view of those who evoke them to study their motives. He also states that memories are selective, full of affectivity and, therefore, are not neutral.

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part of the book, based on the fourteen interviews, Pais organizes the case studies divided into nine chapters.

When analyzing the research carried out by Pais (2001), it is possible to identify approximations with (auto)biographical research. He uses Ferrarotti’s assumptions about the possibility of studying the social through life report; understands the production of the narrative as a work of recalling memories; does not conceive this process as linear, but as an analytical work that each young person carries out on their memories.

## Self-narratives from biographical research interviews

Both for Carles Feixa’s and Machado Pais’ studies, important references for the Sociology of Youth in Brazil, and for researchers of (auto)biographical research, studies with youth presuppose processes of interaction and dialogue between researcher and researched, and the produced narratives allow us to study the social, based on the analyzes that young people carry out of their memories. However, we consider that for (auto)biographical research there are specificities of studying the self-narratives produced by young people. Following, we present some dimensions of this specificity and a brief example of an analysis of the narrative produced by a young Pedagogy student, in a study that focuses on “the challenges and meaning of university life in the first year of the course”.

## Some aspects of the biographical research interview

According to Delory-Momberger (2012, p. 524), “the object of biographical research is to explore the processes of genesis and becoming of individuals within social space, to show how they shape their experiences, how they signify situations and the events of their existence.” Therefore, through cultural and social language

es, as well as through the activity of narrating, the subject performs a work of giving form, a process denominated biographization by Delory-Momberger (2014b).

In the biographical research interview, this narrating activity is triggered by the questions of the present asked by the researcher, enabling biographization processes. The author adds that the biographical research interview is not limited to telling stories but allows the involvement of those who participate in it, aiming to rethink and reconfigure the lived experience. Furthermore, it also provides the process of heterobiographization for the researcher, in which listening to and interpreting the other's narratives generates learning (Delory-Momberger, 2014b; Passeggi, 2021; Reis, 2020).

In the research we carried out on the challenges of the first year for young students enrolled in the Pedagogy course, at a federal public university (2019-2022)<sup>9</sup>, we organized the interview script into four axes: how the university came into your life; challenges experienced in the first year; tactics built along the way; significant moments of the formation.

Ten young people – eight women and two men –, young Pedagogy students, were invited to participate in the interview to reflect on their formation journey in the first year of university, in particular to talk about the challenges they experienced, and the tactics constructed to face them. It is observed that through biographical research interviews, each young person produces a reflective distance about how they interpret the paths taken, the difficulties faced, and the experiential resources mobilized. This process of singular/social reflection is part of the research.

The interviews are transcribed, reorganizing

<sup>9</sup> This is qualitative research, based on a socio-historical-anthropological analysis of the subjects' relationship with the world (Ferrarotti, 2010), and with the perspective of hermeneutics for the interview interpretations (Delory-Momberger, 2014b; Ricoeur, 1983)

the texts, without the questions. Initially, each interview is analyzed as a whole, according to the interpretation of biographical research interviews, following Christine Delory-Momberger (2012, 2014b). Subsequently, the recurring questions in all the interviews are deepened, aiming to scrutinizing knowledge about the questions of the study.

To interpret each transcribed interview, we used two categories proposed by Delory-Momberger (2012, 2014b): “recurrent motives” and “biographical management of motives”. After several readings of each participant's set of interviews, in addition to identifying the recurring themes and motives, we also analyzed the constructed tactics, based on the biographical management of motives.

The category “recurrent motives or *töpoi*”, according to Delory-Momberger (2012, p. 534), originates from the “Greek *topos* or common-place” and refers to the thematization and organization of the actions of the biographical interview. It enables the recognition of the keys to interpreting what has been experienced. Through the work of expressing these privileged places, the narrators “[...] constitute a feeling about themselves and their own forms” (Delory-Momberger, 2012, p. 534). According to the author, “the identification of the biographical management of *töpoi* or motives in terms of socio-individual reality allows to identify the confrontation and negotiation across motives, effective personal and collective resources and socio-structural challenges” (Delory-Momberger, 2012, p. 535). The biographical management of motives presents assessments, negotiations and searches to adjust actions in relation to certain situations. In our study, this process highlights the tactics produced to face the challenges experienced in the first year of the Pedagogy course.

Next, we synthetically present some elements of the analysis of a biographical research

interview, in order to identify how the young student uniquely articulates and interprets the shared experience of entering and staying in the Pedagogy course at a federal public university. In this way, the participant or collaborator produces their own self-narratives, attributing meaning to their experiences to meet the researcher's demands. The reflective process triggered by the narrative provides the emergence of other dimensions of the experience.

In this article, it is not possible to present the entire narrative of the young person's interview, with the details of the theoretical references that serve for the analyses<sup>10</sup>. We prioritize the identification of the general theme, the recurring motives and the biographical management of the motives.

### Example of a biographical research interview: "challenge of building new relationships at university"

We generally present the themes that stand out, the recurring motives and the biographical management of the motives identified in some parts of the interview with a young Pedagogy student enrolled in the night course, at a federal public university, in the Brazilian Northeast.

This is an interview carried out in 2021, with Anne (fictitious name), 21 years old, married,

<sup>10</sup> It is worth highlighting that we used the theory of the relationship with knowledge for such analyzes, which is "the relationship of a subject with the world, with themselves and with others", based on the meaning attributed to the activities experienced in different social spaces (Charlot, 2000, p. 78). They need to master specific logics of learning in these different spaces, including universities; affiliation, "the process by which someone acquires a new social status" (Coulon, 2017, p. 1247). It involves moments of estrangement, learning and affiliation to construct oneself as a student in university life (Reis, 2022), and the sense of belonging, which refers to the student's perception of being an accepted member of the university (Tinto, 2017), as well as in relation to youths at university, the notion of youth status in its multiple dimensions, in the sense used by Dayrell (2007).

with a six-month-old daughter, who lived in a country town, had started working as a contract teacher in Youth and Adult Education (EJA). She had studied teaching during high school. After transcribing the interview, organizing it in the form of a text and several readings, the priority is first given to analyzing the interview as a whole.

It is identified that the theme that stands out, in general, in her narrative, is related to the "*challenges of building new relationships at the university and communicate better*" and those that permeate the interview being transformed into topics, including: "*disillusionment with the university; difficulty participating in classes and interacting with classmates; estrangement in relation to youthful experiences on campus; importance of studies*".

Anne begins her narrative by highlighting that, before entering university, she considered herself a young woman who liked to study. When she was accepted and began her university studies, she faced a barrier in relation to interactions with professors and colleagues. Throughout the narrative, she aims to find meaning in this situation and presents experiences that she considers that contributed to overcoming these challenges. When interpreting the narrative, we identify the recurring motives and the biographical management of the motives and carry out a dialogue with the theoretical references. This allows us to deepen into the issues raised in the narrative, although we do not present them in this text.

Below, we briefly highlight some notable moments from the interview. It is identified from Anne's narratives that, even though she got along well with her studies in high school and the dream of being accepted in a university, she experienced a moment of disillusionment in relation to when she began, which made her deconstruct the dreams she had about the idea of what the university was like.

*It wasn't entirely as I imagined, because teaching here in the countryside, I believe in many towns, is not as, I'll use the word, let's say 'heavy' as at university. It's different. High school compared to higher education has a lot of differences and when you leave high school and begin higher education you are faced with articles, texts, books that you have to read. In high school, you aren't asked much for reading books, even though I studied teaching, but there weren't many demands. I used to read books because I liked them. I've always loved reading, but I also didn't read books with so much theoretical basis. I liked other genres more. And then there was the burden of having to see that it wasn't like that, that I had to work hard to get good grades and get the passing grade too, so that I could, so to speak, thrive. I was always that type of girl who participated in school activities. When I arrived at university, I couldn't do it. I became very withdrawn, I was stuck, I couldn't do it.*

The difficulties experienced in meeting study requirements and communicating with professors and peers create a barrier. Anne considers this barrier to be the greatest challenge she faced in university life. This *idea of barrier is a recurring motive*, as it is always revisited at different moments in the interview.

She also argues that this feeling of not being able to express herself and the need to make an effort to understand the content was also experienced by other students, one of whom was her friend, course colleague and lived in the same town.

*It was just the two of us, for home assignments, for everything, we didn't build relationships with other students. We closed ourselves off a lot and then I wondered. I say: - 'I'm not the person I've always been, very participative'. I like communicating, making friends and everything. And at university, I was very limited and I was ashamed to speak. Even when the teachers asked, I couldn't speak. To this day I still have a little bit of that. I don't know why and I don't know if it was because of that pressure I suffered last year that ended up harming my communication performance at university, but I believe it is one of*

*my main challenges: building new relationships at university, communicate better.*

Anne identifies a relationship between the challenges of appropriating specific logics of learning from academic culture and sociability with colleagues. In her reflections, she articulates her difficulties in relation to her studies, with her distance from her classmates on the course. Anne reports:

*When I came here, I faced difficulties. Instead of being able to solve them, overcome them, I kept them there and that hurt me a lot. Then the issue of teaching came out, which was a completely different type of teaching. The word is not 'heavy', but I forgot the word now, but it is a more theoretical teaching. In this first period, in these first periods of the course, it is the more theoretical part. [...] Then I think it was a blow, that first scare and after that I also became very attached to my colleague, who already came from my town, I identified with her and ended up forgetting that I had other relationships at the university even for my own performance. I believe it was a combination of these things.*

The issue of feeling a barrier is reiterated, which creates *difficulty in participating in classes and relating to colleagues*. An experience that she considers important for overcoming these difficulties refers to the presentation of a paper in the course that addressed the basic principles of Education. The seminar was at the end of the second period. The groups had to perform in the auditorium, and she prepared at home to overcome her stage fright. She explains that she was very apprehensive but managed to introduce herself. Having faced the challenge helped overcome other difficulties.

It is understood that, for Anne, the process of preparing herself and being able to express herself in the seminar is, in the sense of Delory-Momberger (2012), an example of "biographical management of motives", as a moment of confrontation and overcoming.

Anne says that she wondered why she felt this difficulty in participating in classes and the distance from her colleagues. She emphasizes that “*working as a Youth and Adult Education teacher*” contributes to facing these challenges. She explains that she began to reflect on these difficulties. She was working as a teacher and could not continue without expressing herself in the classroom. She started participating in groups. Professional performance is, therefore, another biographical management of motives.

Anne reports another remarkable, but difficult experience in her routine at university. These are “*parties organized by students*”. She comments:

*There are a lot of parties and it was very difficult to get used to them, because I thought everything was different, maybe because I'm from the countryside, more reserved. And then when I got there, people had very different cultures. I met people who presented other versions, other views of some things. They were remarkable experiences with people, with other ideologies and I was able to get to know them and relate better. I met a lot of different people. Now it was difficult for me. People come to study and party. I don't know how they can manage to enjoy and study at the same time, because I wouldn't be able to.*

We interpret that Anne's estrangement in relation to youthful experiences on *campus* is related to the distance between her values, cultural references, as a student from the countryside and those of other young students on the course. In addition to the process of building each young person as a student, university life is a space for youthful experiences. Approximations occur within it; estrangements or confrontations between different ways of living among young people, which are related to markers of social class, gender, race, cultural and religious references that young people bring from other spaces in which they transit.

Anne reports that she was interested, that she would like to have other engagement ex-

periences at the university, related to extension, research, elective courses, for example. However, because she needed to travel from one town to another every day, she was unable to take part in activities outside of classroom hours, even because she already spent many hours traveling to study.

In this aspect, we deal with the objective and subjective issues that involved her construction as a student: financial conditions, the need to travel from one town to another, which limited the time to experience university life in all its dimensions, such as teaching, research, extension, engagement in youth groups, etc.

At the end of the interview, Anne explains the importance of studies in her life. Valuing herself as a person involved other people recognizing how good she was as a student. Therefore, we can understand the weight of the difficulties she faced, both in understanding the demands of the study and in expressing herself to her colleagues at the beginning of the course. Of all the reasons that permeate the report, the issue of fear of expressing herself in the classroom, of not being able to participate, insecurities regarding one's intellectual capacity and of being accepted by the class is the central issue.

When analyzing Anne's report, it becomes evident that her condition as a night student, mother, worker, from a rural town, hinders her engagement in different dimensions of university life, even though she is interested in getting involved in activities beyond the classroom.

At different moments of the interview, reflections on the experienced process emerge. We also held a second meeting, called “shared reflective restitution” for an in-depth reflection on the narrative produced in the first interview, made available in advance by email. Such meetings are “moments of deepening reflections, of new inquiries and spaces for “carrying out experience” and “biographical learning”,

configuring new and important stages of research” (Reis, 2021, p. 15). In dialogue, they can complement, exclude or bring new perspectives on the issues addressed in the narrative. For the researcher, it is an important moment for new inquiries to deepen knowledge on the covered subject.

In this second moment, Anne explains that the interview provides an intense reflection on her relationship with the university and the challenges faced. She reports that she began to make connections between aspects that she had not thought about. She did not suggest additions or suppressions of what was reported in the first interview.

After carrying out an in-depth analysis of the first and second interviews with each participant, another stage of analysis takes place. This time the issues that permeate the set of interviews are identified and they are deepened, in light of the theoretical framework of the research. In this article we do not address this other dimension of the analysis.

Regarding the analysis of the narratives produced by Anne, it is important to highlight that, when we identify the tone of the research or the major issue that permeates her entire report, we are analyzing the issue that most affects the young student in relation to the challenges with the university at the time of search. Her narrative allows her to identify the articulations she makes in relation to the fragments of what she has experienced, her reframing to find meaning in her experiences. Such interpretations are possible due to the reserve of available knowledge at hand, as Schütz (1979) explains, from different social spaces as well as provided in the activities experienced at the university.

## Final considerations

The question of the place of narrative in the study of youth was analyzed based on the con-

tributions by Carles Feixa, Machado Pais, references for the Sociology of Youth in Brazil, as well as Maria da Conceição Passeggi, Elizeu Clementino de Souza and Christine Delory-Momberger, among others, as references for (auto)biographical research. In this dialogue, we can highlight both approximations and specificities.

We have identified that the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the Chicago School are a landmark for both strands of research. According to Feixa, for the Sociology of Youth, until the 1920s the Chicago School studies marked the legitimization of field research and the appreciation of the perspective of research subjects, including young people. According to the author, personal materials, such as letters, autobiographical writings, diaries, etc. are used. Also, within the scope of (auto)biographical research, according to Christine Delory-Momberger (2014a), the legitimization of these materials is considered important, as a precursor movement to the use of research procedures with a biographical focus.

However, both Feixa (1999) and Delory-Momberger (2014a) criticize the Chicago School research. Feixa (1999) questions the liberal reformist character of the researchers, who sought solutions to “social disturbances”, without considering the social context that generated these disturbances, which, in turn, contributed to strengthening the representation of young people as problems, especially those in unfavorable social conditions and excluded from society, such as black people, immigrants, etc. Delory-Momberger (2014a), in turn, criticizes the use of biographical documents as annexes only to ratify pre-conceived analyses.

Another approach found is the use of Franco Ferrarotti’s theoretical framework, in Feixa’s studies, as well as in Pais’ studies and in the studies by (auto)biographical researchers.



Ferrarotti's (2010) premise that it is possible to read the social from a biography is recurrent in both aspects. It is also known that Ferrarotti was a critic of the functionalist perspective of research in Social Sciences and that he has defended the biographical approach since the 1950s. Thus, we can say that both Pais and Feixa share the questions regarding such research and are closer of the narrative turn of the 1980s, by the Life History movement. It is no coincidence that they refer to the use of narratives based on Life Histories in their studies and that they call their interviews with young people life histories.

We consider that both Feixa and Pais, as well as researchers linked to (auto)biographical research, study youth, valuing moments of dialogue to gain access to their modes of expression and having co-participation in research as a principle. Therefore, there is a concern with building a space of trust. We also identified that Feixa (1999) conducts interviews with life histories with various meetings, as proposed by Delory-Momberger, (2012; 2014b) in relation to the biographical research interview and as we propose in our research with young people (Reis, 2021; 2022).

It can be stated that the differences in the study by Feixa and Pais, in the case of scholars in the field of Sociology of Youth and for researchers of (auto)biographical research, are the way of focusing on the scope of the produced narratives. For Feixa (1999) and Pais (2001), narratives denominated life histories are field research techniques. They allow us to study young people in the spaces in which they move, research their modes of expression reflexively, and understand their concerns. Such productions are interpreted and enable the identification of data to understand the research questions.

For studies with young people within the scope of (auto)biographical research, the pro-

duction of self-narratives by young people in different languages, whether orally, written, or through images, individually or in groups, is a reflective process, based on questions about the present, raised by the researcher.

The work of narrating produces learning and allows young people to reflect on their experiences. Therefore, self-narrative, in addition to providing knowledge about the research questions, also provides both the participant and the researcher with a process of self-formation as part of the research. It is understood that through the biographical research interview, each participant can carry out a reflective return on themselves, which is also a reflective return on others and the world, based on the interpretations of lived experiences and learning in different social spaces (Reis, 2023). The interview is, at the same time, a reflective moment with potential for self-formation and, also, a fruitful path for the researcher to interpret and understand their research questions.

When it comes to the biographical research interview procedures, it is worth reinforcing that the participant can reflect on their experiences, according to the questions that trigger the dialogue, formulated based on some axes that are prepared. Using the example of Anne's self-narrative, it is possible to explain the importance of initially analyzing each interview as a whole.

Anne works to construct her narrative, re-configuring and re-signifying what she has experienced, based on her current issues. She goes through a reflective, biographical process, instigated by the researcher's questions. During the interview, she lists the dimensions she understands as the most important regarding the challenges of the first years at university. In this process, she prioritizes as a major theme "*the challenge of building new relationships at university*" and, based on this, she lists as recurring motives the fear of expressing

herself due to the difficulty of understanding the content; the limitation of interaction with a colleague from the countryside, the strangeness regarding the ways young people express themselves at university parties, etc.

Anne also seeks to understand the experiences that enable these motives to be overcome. She lists, for example, studies at home, overcoming the seminar presentation, strengthening herself after starting to work as a teacher, which are configured as biographical management of motives.

This process allows us to identify the interpretations and meanings of Anne's experiences, based on her social class and gender condition, as a woman, mother and student in different social spaces, considering the challenges in relation to the course. The interpretation of each narrative as a whole allows to study the unique social processes experienced by Anne, as well as providing her with the opportunity to reflect on issues not previously thought of, which can generate processes of self-formation.

Anne is not just a young woman, a student at a federal public university, who experiences difficulties. Other interviewees also share common challenges, both in relation to the social context and the demands of academic culture.

We consider, in line with Ferrarotti (2010), that it is possible to read the social from a biography, as these issues also permeate the experiences of other young people who share the same social and academic context and participate in the research. Therefore, in a second step, the questions that permeate the set of interviews are identified and analyzed in light of the theoretical framework that underpins the research.

To conclude, in this initial approach, we consider that there are relevant contributions from the use of self-narratives in research with young people in the dialogue between the as-

sumptions of Sociology of Youth and (auto) biographical research. We also understand that (auto)biographical research, as formation-research<sup>11</sup>, presents specificities in the ways of conceiving "self-narratives", enhancing dialogue and youthful modes of expression. By privileging self-narratives as enhancers of spaces of reflexivity, recognized as part of the study, (auto)biographical research provides the production of knowledge in relation to research questions and, concomitantly, important processes of self-formation for the research participants, who are fundamental when it comes to carrying out research with young people.

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11 We share with Josso the notion of research-formation as: "[...] interaction centered on the management of intersubjectivity between researchers and actors/participants, [...] which allows the creation of the necessary conditions for understanding training [...] through the mediation of a formative experience". (2010, p. 145),

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