

## Abstract

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Grounded in the theoretical framework of Historical-Cultural Psychology, which emphasizes the significance of formal educational processes in individual development, affirming that they are based on each person's learning experiences, the research presented in this abstract aimed to explore the experiences that shape the educational backgrounds of young high school graduates. The goal is to understand how personal meanings about education are formed.

To reveal essential relationships — that is, those not apparent in the process of meaning formation — our work was organized based on the historical-dialectical materialism method. Through abstractions, we aimed to reconstruct the links between experiences and personal meanings. We emphasize the importance of this method in psychological studies because it allows us to overcome the overemphasis on subjectivity and the loss of articulation with objectivity. Marx's recovery of the centrality of objectivity enables us to achieve this. Furthermore, this epistemological approach enables

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us to understand the developmental process of the psyche, as advocated by Historical-Cultural Psychology. These principles guided the research process and the development of this theoretical and empirical study.

Regarding the theoretical research, we focused on the concepts of meaning and experience. We studied these concepts in relation to the central categories of activity and consciousness, as well as the concepts of the social situation and periodization of development. We relied mainly on texts by Vygotsky and Leontiev.

Regarding the empirical study, we emphasize its longitudinal nature since it involved four young people (two males and two females aged 18-19) who were also subjects of my master's research<sup>3</sup>. At the time of this thesis research, three were attending higher education institutions, while one was in the last year of high school. The empirical material was developed from initial and recurring interviews based on semi-structured scripts. The aim was to identify experiences that marked the schooling process and the constitution of meanings about education in the subject-environment relationship. In other words, we based our analysis on the young people's narratives about their educational history. Through the participants' narratives, we gained insight into how they subjectivized and internalized the environment at different stages of their lives. This provided us with information about the meanings constructed in relation to each situation they experienced and reported to us.

We emphasize this point because, as Vygotsky (1933/1995) states, if we do not understand the environment in a relative manner, in terms of how it was experienced by the subject, we risk only reaching the surface of their experiences. This would make it impossible for us to understand the meaning they attributed to them. According to the author, we must go beyond the visible

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<sup>3</sup> “The meaning and significance of high school for students: a study based on historical-cultural psychology” is the title of my master’s thesis, completed in the Graduate Program in Psychology at the State University of Maringá, under the guidance of Professor Nilza Sanches Tessaro Leonardo, PhD. This work can be accessed at the following link: [http://www.ppi.uem.br/arquivos-2019/UEM\\_PPI\\_Leticia%20Cavalieri%20Beiser%20de%20Melo.pdf](http://www.ppi.uem.br/arquivos-2019/UEM_PPI_Leticia%20Cavalieri%20Beiser%20de%20Melo.pdf).

to truly explain phenomena and their fundamental determinants. To do so, Oliveira (2005) says we must go beyond formal logic, which captures phenomena in a static manner, and use dialectical logic to understand them in motion. This is because, as he writes, "reality is processed through uninterrupted movement" (p. 14), where the singular, particular, and universal dimensions are interconnected.

Tanamachi, Asbahr, and Bernardes (2018) and Martins (2019) state that the term "universal" refers to characteristics that define the generic human being. These characteristics are universal and refer to the objective conditions of human organization throughout history. On the other end of the spectrum is the singular dimension, expressed uniquely and unrepeatably in objects and phenomena in time and space. Finally, the particular dimension refers to the circumstances and conditions that mediate the formation of the singular in its relationship with the universal.

In our research, after the initial interviews and initial analysis of the information, we identified some recurring and prominent aspects that were a common thread in the participants' stories. Especially regarding the role of the family in shaping personal views on education. In an attempt to understand this phenomenon, we sought further information through recurring interviews, changing our research focus somewhat, as well as reorganizing our study and theoretical elaboration.

According to Netto (2011), successive movements of approximation are necessary in the process of producing knowledge about an object. Since apprehending human social phenomena is only possible when they are understood as processes in motion linked to a broader context that changes historically, given their complexity. We experienced this understanding in our research when we recognized the need to include family as a focal point for understanding experiences in the schooling process and their impact on the formation of educational meaning. In line with Netto's statement, to understand the experiences of the educational journey, we had to examine the

broader context of the lives of the research participants. Their experiences occur within the dynamics of their concrete existence, involving the mutual influence of the various social spaces in which they participate.

Supported by the method's categories of totality and singularity, we affirm the validity of biographical studies since totality is present in singularity. According to Martins (2019), the singular, the particular, and the universal do not exist abstractly, but rather as dimensions of all objects and phenomena. Thus, universality is expressed in the singular subject. Furthermore, Sève (1979, 1989) defends biographical studies that focus on understanding the material determinants in the formation of singular individuals and personality as a result of multiple relationships. He emphasizes the need for studies of subjectivity based on a materialist philosophical-methodological framework, which he considers the only possibility for constructing a "science of personality."

According to the author, "Biography is to personality what history is to society" (Sève, 1979, p. 614). From this perspective, we investigate the unique stories of young people to demonstrate the inseparability of consciousness and effective reality. Through constant interaction, objectivity, and subjectivity influence each other reciprocally and uninterruptedly. We can better understand this concept through the idea of experience. Additionally, by analyzing the four biographies and articulating them, we seek to understand the relationships between the universal, the particular, and the singular. We identify the singularities and aspects that intertwine the different stories. In these stories, the particular (as mediation) and the universal (as a generic human dimension, a product of historical and social practice) can be evidenced.

In conceptual terms, our focus is on experiences and their relationship with the constitution of personal meanings. However, due to the understanding of total psychic functioning defended by Historical-Cultural Psychology authors and reinforced by Leontiev's (1983) proposition that meanings constitute consciousness, we felt the need to briefly address the

concepts of consciousness and personality in developing theoretical research. Additionally, we discuss the periodization of development and the role of formal education in this process.

According to Leontiev (1983), individuals actively appropriate culture. Based on their experiences, they construct an internal reflection of their reality, imprinting their affections and motives on it. Since the process of humanization is primarily mediated by members of the small family group, it was necessary to discuss the family, the relationships established by and for it, and the psychological development possibilities arising from it in this study. This will help us understand individual development, as the analysis of empirical data highlighted the role of family relationships in the educational trajectory of the young research participants. Additionally, guided by our research objective to investigate experiences to understand the constitution of meanings about education, we reflected on the function of school as defended by historical-critical pedagogy. We also focused on the relationships and mediations that promote the appropriation of scientific knowledge in contemporary schooling, given the importance of such social interactions for understanding the humanization process of the analyzed subjects. To deepen our discussion of the educational process, we address these two major areas of development: the family and the school. We reflect on their main characteristics and real possibilities for development, considering the relationships formed within them.

In our thesis, the participants were presented based on biographical summaries prepared from interviews that were organized and discussed in five major thematic areas: I. Family: Life Paths, Values, and Relationship with School and Knowledge; II. The Schooling Process; III. Private Life and School Life: Two Worlds that Intersect; IV. Relationships Between Study and Work; and V. Who I Am Today and How School Is Part of That. These themes were defined based on the analysis of the gathered information and resulted from the abstraction process carried out during the research.

In each section, we highlight the participants' unique experiences and consider the interrelationship between situations in their environment, how these situations were experienced, and the consequences of these experiences on the participants' development in each period of their lives. This allows us to understand the meanings formed in the process.

In the first axis, "Family: Life Paths, Values, and Their Relationship with School and Knowledge," we sought to analyze the experiences of the research participants by understanding their life paths in relation to their families' trajectories. As social beings whose psychic constitution is based on relationships with group members, the family occupies a prominent place because individuals begin acquiring human knowledge and learning social ways of life within the family. Furthermore, since this acquisition is mediated by the family, the social meanings it assimilates, as well as those constructed throughout its history, greatly impact the formation of its members. They appropriate the world based on their family group's ways of perceiving and experiencing it.

In axis II, "The Schooling Process," we analyzed the relationship of each young person with school and knowledge, their paths in school, and how the experiences that marked this process influenced their views on education. Through their memories, we attempted to reconstruct the connections in the complex network of experiences and meanings that shaped their unique perspectives on education.

In Axis III, "Private Life and School Life: Two Worlds That Intersect," we address specific aspects of the lives of the young people in the study that we felt had a significant influence on their school career, were a point of conflict, or impacted the direction of their educational path. These themes emerged naturally from the students' accounts and include bullying, sexual violence, and mental illness. While these themes refer to specific situations in each person's history, they also reflect the unique characteristics of our socio-historical organization.

In Axis IV, "Relationships between Study and Work," we discuss young people's experiences related to high school. We explore the relationship between study and work, understanding the latter as a paid professional activity performed by young people in the labor market. We chose to discuss work experiences and the high school education process together because all the young people in this study began working while they were in high school.

In Axis V, "Who am I today, and how does school fit into this," we explore how experiences during schooling shape young people's psychological development, forming their sense of self and, consequently, their personality. Since all the research participants engaged in study or professional activities, a characteristic of late adolescence and early adulthood, we were able to analyze how their personalities developed in relation to the educational process.

Finally, based on the identification of regularities at the intersection of the four biographies analyzed within the five axes, we attempted to find the common thread in the participants' psychological formation. We stitched together their reported experiences to understand the historical process of meaning-making about education within their biographies. Since the schooling process is an integral part of the lives of most individuals in post-industrial societies like Brazil, it is impossible to effectively separate experiences specific to a single social space. These experiences express the unity between individuals' external and internal worlds. As we found in our analysis of the biographies, experiences related to family life and school life integrate and influence each other continuously.

However, we identified significant shared meanings about education within families that guided the process of forming personal meanings among the young people interviewed. This occurred from two perspectives: concrete experiences, as they shared certain life circumstances within the family group, and symbolic perspectives resulting from the appropriation of family meanings in interpersonal exchanges. As the family is the first space for socialization, what is initially learned and reinforced through everyday experiences becomes

part of an individual's psyche and mediates their relationship with the world. Thus, students begin school with certain beliefs about education and develop personal beliefs based on their experiences.

Since experiences are affective-cognitive units, the meanings that comprise the subjects' consciousness influence how they interpret and experience situations, maintaining a connection to what has already been internalized. By situating experiences within the subjects' life histories and educational journeys, we can identify the chain of needs and possibilities that motivated them in a particular direction in their educational lives. The study of biographies revealed the different needs of subjects at various life stages and how these needs were met by the opportunities available at school and in their interactions. These opportunities either satisfied or failed to satisfy their needs, resulting in more or less fruitful relationships with the school itself.

As Vygotsky (2018) explains, we cannot only consider the characteristics of the environment or the school; we must also observe how each subject relates to that environment and consider their internal and external needs and possibilities at each moment. Given the complexity of the demands of adolescents as developing subjects, new studies that emphasize development and learning are important, not only in psychology but also in other areas of knowledge. These studies directly interfere with the way the student/school relationship occurs.

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