

The Professional Dimension in the Life Project: challenges and possibilities of Career Guidance in São Paulo Public High Schools ¹

*A Dimensão Profissional no Projeto de Vida:
desafios e possibilidades da Orientação Profissional no Ensino Médio Público Paulista*

*La Dimensión Profesional en el Proyecto de Vida:
desafíos y posibilidades de la Orientación Profesional en la Educación Secundaria Pública Paulista*

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Abstract: This article analyzes the inclusion of the professional dimension within the Life Project curricular component of São Paulo's public high schools, based on the intersection of educational policies and pedagogical practices. Using a qualitative approach, the research combined a literature review, document analysis of legislation and slides from the São Paulo Media Center (CMSP), as well as interviews with coordinators from four state schools in Franca, SP. The results indicate that, although the teaching materials cover content related to the world of work and career development, their approach is generalist and insufficiently contextualized to the reality of public school students. It was observed that the effectiveness of the professional dimension in the classroom depends on the teacher's intentionality and school conditions. The study concludes that, although not yet formalized as public policy, career guidance is an essential tool for building more conscious and viable life projects, especially when aligned with policies that promote educational equity and youth empowerment.

Keywords: Life Project; High School; Educational Policies; Career guidance; World of work.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa a inserção da dimensão profissional no componente curricular Projeto de Vida do Ensino Médio Público Paulista, a partir da articulação entre políticas educacionais e práticas pedagógicas. Com abordagem qualitativa, a pesquisa combinou revisão bibliográfica, análise documental de legislações e dos slides do Centro de Mídias de São Paulo (CMSP), além de entrevistas com coordenadores de quatro escolas estaduais de Franca/SP. Os resultados indicam que, embora os materiais didáticos contemplem conteúdos sobre mercado de trabalho e carreira, sua abordagem é generalista e pouco contextualizada à realidade dos estudantes da rede pública. Observou-se que a efetividade da dimensão profissional nas aulas depende da intencionalidade docente e das condições escolares. Conclui-se que a Orientação Profissional, mesmo não formalizada como política pública, constitui um instrumento essencial para a construção de projetos de vida mais conscientes e viáveis, especialmente quando articulada com políticas de equidade educacional e valorização da juventude.

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Palavras-chave: Projeto de Vida; Ensino Médio; Políticas Educacionais; Orientação Profissional; Mercado de trabalho.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza la incorporación de la dimensión profesional en el componente curricular Proyecto de Vida del nivel medio de la educación pública paulista, a partir de la articulación entre políticas educativas y prácticas pedagógicas. Con un enfoque cualitativo, la investigación combinó revisión bibliográfica, análisis documental de legislaciones y de las presentaciones del Centro de Medios de São Paulo (CMSP), además de entrevistas con coordinadores de cuatro escuelas estatales de Franca, SP. Los resultados indican que, aunque los materiales didácticos abordan contenidos sobre el mercado laboral y la carrera profesional, su enfoque es generalista y poco contextualizado a la realidad del alumnado de la red pública. Se observó que la efectividad de la dimensión profesional en las clases depende de la intencionalidad del docente y de las condiciones escolares. Se concluye que la Orientación Profesional, aun sin estar formalizada como política pública, constituye una herramienta esencial para la construcción de proyectos de vida más conscientes y viables, especialmente cuando se articula con políticas de equidad educativa y valorización de la juventud.

Palabras clave: Proyecto de Vida; Educación Secundaria; Políticas Educativas; Orientación profesional; Mercado laboral.

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Introduction

In recent decades, social, economic, and technological transformations have demanded a reframing of the school's role in fostering autonomous, critical individuals, prepared to face the challenges of the contemporary world. In this context, the construction of a "life project" (projeto de vida) has gained centrality as a structuring axis of the school curriculum, especially in high school, the final stage of basic education and a fundamental moment for decisions that directly impact young people's futures. The proposal of the "Life Project" curricular component, implemented in the São Paulo state public school network, emerges as a response to this demand by seeking to articulate the personal, civic, and professional dimensions of student development.

However, although the curricular proposal encompasses the professional dimension, aimed at preparing students for the world of work and the construction of conscious professional trajectories, questions arise regarding the effectiveness of this approach in everyday school life. The absence of consolidated public policies for Career Guidance (CG) and the social inequalities that permeate the Brazilian educational system impose concrete limits on the construction of a viable life project for the majority of students in the public school system.

Given this scenario, this article aims to analyze how the professional dimension is being addressed within the "Life Project" component in São Paulo state public schools, based on the articulation between educational policies and pedagogical practices.

The investigation is grounded in studies on education and work, as well as theoretical frameworks of Career Guidance and educational policy analysis, engaging with authors such as Abade (2005), Melo-Silva, Lassance, and Soares (2004), Lisboa (2017), Moura (2014), and Suzuki and Polli (2021). Furthermore, it draws upon Brazilian educational regulatory frameworks, such as the 1988 Federal Constitution, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 9.394/1996), the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), and the Currículo Paulista, seeking to understand how curricular guidelines are appropriated and materialized in daily school life.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative study that combines bibliographic review, documentary analysis of legislation and official materials, and semi-structured interviews with pedagogical coordinators from state schools in the municipality of Franca, SP. By exploring the challenges and possibilities of the professional dimension within the "Life Project" component, this study seeks to contribute to the debate on the education of youth and the role of the school in the construction of academic and professional trajectories.

Educational Policies in High School and the World of Work

Within the educational sphere, public policies such as the Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB), the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), and the Currículo Paulista serve as fundamental guidelines for basic education in Brazil. They constitute the starting point of this research, which focuses specifically on high school and the preparation of students for their professional choices.

High school is the final stage of basic education. According to the 1988 Federal Constitution, "education, a right of all and a duty of the State and the family, shall be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aimed at the full development of the person, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and their qualification for work" (Brazil, 1988, art. 205). However, the country's educational reality reveals that this phase faces significant challenges in guaranteeing this right.

The National Common Curricular Base, in its General Competence 6 for basic education, proposes that students develop the ability to:

6. Value the diversity of knowledge and cultural experiences and appropriate knowledge and experiences that enable them to understand the relationships inherent to the world of work and make choices aligned with the exercise of citizenship and their life project, with freedom, autonomy, critical consciousness, and responsibility (Brasil, 2017, p. 9).

In this sense, the "Life Project" curricular component was implemented:

[...] the Life Project functions as the articulator of the school's pedagogical project, while simultaneously being a curricular component implemented in all schools of the São Paulo State Public Network for the final years of elementary school and high school, starting in 2020 (São Paulo, 2020, p. 2).

The goal of the Life Project is to "address three interconnected dimensions: the personal, the civic, and the professional, which include the dimensions of the child, the adolescent, the youth, and the adult as a student" (São Paulo, 2020, p. 11).

The professional dimension is the primary object of study in this research and holds special relevance in the context of public high school, considering that many students face the need to work early to contribute to family income. This intensifies the urgency of pedagogical actions that foster conscious and viable professional choices. Adolescence and youth are phases in which the future approaches concretely, demanding decisions that will directly impact students' personal, academic, and professional trajectories.

However, it is observed that many students struggle to visualize career options, identify their potential, or understand the demands of the world of work. This gap can be partially bridged by Career Guidance (CG) initiatives, whose purpose is precisely to provide theoretical and practical support for more assertive decision-making based on self-knowledge, the recognition of opportunities, and reflection on the challenges and limitations of their social reality.

The professional dimension proposed in the Life Project, therefore, should not be limited to presenting professions or technical paths; rather, it should assume the commitment to support young people in constructing a critical and realistic perspective on work, including the appreciation of their identity, their desires, and the concrete conditions in which they are situated. The effects of this process are broad, benefiting not only the individual, who may achieve greater professional satisfaction and fulfillment, but also society, which is strengthened by citizens who are better prepared, engaged, and conscious of their role within the collective.

Career Guidance in Public Policies

Academic literature indicates that career guidance is not yet effectively integrated into national public policies, despite its potential in different contexts (Lisboa, 2017). In the public sector, its practice has been concentrated in services provided by psychology programs linked to professional internships or isolated community actions (Abade, 2005; Melo-Silva, Lassance, & Soares, 2004, as cited in Lisboa, 2017). Lisboa (2017) also links Career Guidance (CG) to employment, labor, and income policies, highlighting the 1988 Federal Constitution, which recognizes work as a social right, and the Organic Law of Social Assistance, which provides for the promotion of labor market integration as a strategy to combat poverty.

Moura (2014), when addressing CG for low-income youth, advocates for its inclusion in social inclusion policies and proposed its application in programs such as Pronatec, although she emphasizes the need for better training of technical teams. Suzuki and Polli (2021) observe that, although the LDB establishes guidelines for national education, it does not directly address career guidance; they note that while there have been bills proposing its inclusion, none have been approved to date.

From a critical perspective, career guidance cannot be understood merely as an individual process of occupational choice. Young people's decisions are conditioned by social, economic, and cultural factors that delimit their objective possibilities of choice. In this sense, Career Guidance assumes a role that goes beyond the simple provision of career information, contributing to reflection on life projects, work, and citizenship. Such an understanding is especially relevant in the context of public schools, where many students experience situations of social vulnerability that directly influence their educational and professional expectations.

Current legal texts still do not mandate the provision of Career Guidance services that could promote opportunities for developing decision-making skills and core competencies for career construction and participation in the world of work. Although career guidance is not formally prescribed by public policies, it is believed that it can play a significant role in labor market access, promoting positive socioeconomic development for social assistance beneficiaries and public agencies working in this field (Lisboa, 2017).

In short, it is evident that the inclusion of CG in Brazilian public policies is essential to support young people in decision-making and in constructing professional trajectories that are more aligned with their interests, skills, and aspirations. However, it must be

acknowledged that CG, in itself, is not sufficient to guarantee equal opportunities for professional choice. As previously mentioned, Brazil faces a structural problem that precedes young people's decision-making: social inequality.

A large portion of high school students do not have the actual freedom to choose their careers, as they must enter the labor market quickly to ensure their own subsistence or contribute to family income. This reality is reflected in high dropout rates: according to the School Census (MEC, 2024), high school has the highest abandonment rate. However, this exclusion does not occur solely due to a lack of career guidance, but primarily due to the absence of concrete opportunities.

Thus, for CG to fulfill its role of assisting young people in building their professional futures, it must be articulated with a broader set of public policies aimed at improving the quality of high school education and reducing social inequality. Only by guaranteeing minimum conditions for choice, such as access to quality education, school retention programs, and policies that encourage higher education and professional qualification, will it be possible to expand the real opportunities for youth in the world of work.

Therefore, CG presents itself as a relevant instrument, but one that only reaches its full potential when inserted into a context that ensures young people the possibility to choose, rather than merely accepting what is imposed upon them by circumstances.

Methodology

This research is characterized as qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive in nature, aiming to understand how the professional dimension has been addressed within the "Life Project" curricular component in the São Paulo state public high school system. To this end, three methodological strategies were adopted: bibliographic review, documentary research, and field research.

The bibliographic research was conducted based on relevant works in the fields of education and career guidance, such as books, scientific articles, theses, and dissertations, as well as materials published in specialized journals, such as the *Revista Brasileira de Orientação Profissional*. The objective was to gather the necessary theoretical contributions to ground the discussion on the relationship between public policies, the "Life Project," and the world of work.

The documentary research involved the analysis of educational legislation, such as the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), and the Currículo Paulista, which guide the organization of

high school in the state of São Paulo. Additionally, the slides for the "Life Project" curricular component provided by the São Paulo Media Center (Centro de Mídias de São Paulo – CMSP), which are used by public school teachers as pedagogical material in the classroom, were analyzed. For a more in-depth analysis, the content referring to the third year of high school was selected, focusing on the four quarters of 2024, as they presented a higher incidence of topics related to professional choice and the labor market.

The field research was conducted in four state high schools in the municipality of Franca, São Paulo. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with representatives from the management teams of these schools, seeking to understand their perceptions regarding the practical application of the "Life Project" and the approach to the professional dimension in daily school life. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed based on the content analysis technique, allowing for the identification of categories of meaning related to pedagogical practices, teacher training, and the challenges faced by schools in the operationalization of this curricular component.

The triangulation of bibliographic, documentary, and empirical data enabled a comprehensive analysis of the potential and limitations of Career Guidance within the context of the "Life Project," contributing to reflections on its effectiveness and the possible paths for its strengthening within educational public policies.

Results

Documentary Analysis of Official "Life Project" Materials

The documentary analysis was conducted based on the slides for the "Life Project" curricular component provided by the São Paulo Media Center (CMSP), referring to the third year of high school in 2024. The materials address topics related to the labor market, higher education, career planning, employability, and preparation for professional life.

It was observed that the content is organized progressively throughout the four quarters, ranging from introductory concepts on how the labor market functions to practical activities, such as resume writing, job interview preparation, the use of vocational tests, and the organization of career fairs.

In general, the materials provide relevant information for the construction of students' life projects, especially by presenting possibilities for academic education, professional insertion, and the development of skills valued in the world of work. However, the

predominant approach approximates an informative perspective of career guidance, centered on the transmission of knowledge regarding careers, employability, and individual planning.

In this sense, Melo-Silva, Lassance, and Soares (2004) highlight that career guidance should not be restricted to the provision of occupational information but must encompass processes of self-knowledge, critical reflection, and analysis of the conditions that influence professional choices. Similarly, Moura (2014) emphasizes that young people's occupational trajectories are strongly conditioned by socioeconomic factors, especially among low-income students.

Although the analyzed materials address relevant aspects of the labor market and higher education, there is less emphasis on discussions related to social inequalities, objective conditions for professional choice, and the characteristics of the regional contexts in which students are inserted. This aspect becomes particularly relevant considering the social and economic diversity present in the São Paulo public school system.

Another point identified refers to the proposed practical activities, such as the use of digital platforms and the organization of career fairs. Despite their pedagogical potential, the effectiveness of these actions depends on the structural conditions of the schools and students' access to the necessary technological resources.

Thus, it is verified that the analyzed materials have the potential to contribute to the construction of students' life projects, but they still favor a generalist perspective of career guidance, offering less space for contextualized reflections on social inequalities and the concrete opportunities for professional insertion experienced by young people.

Coordinators' Perceptions of the Professional Dimension in the "Life Project"

The interviews conducted with representatives of the pedagogical coordination teams from the four participating state schools revealed diverse yet complementary perceptions regarding the application of the professional dimension in the "Life Project" component. In general, the importance of the topic is recognized, but the challenges faced for its effective implementation in daily school life are also highlighted.

When asked whether they believed it was important to address more practical issues regarding the labor market with students in class, especially within the "Life Project" curriculum, focusing on professional options, choices, and possibilities rather than exclusively on socio-emotional skills, the participants provided the following insights:

Interviewee A recognizes the importance of addressing the labor market and the university future within the classroom, helping students reflect on their professional choices.

However, she observes that the social context and opportunities outside the school also directly impact students' life projects. She considers that practical subjects, such as university entrance exam preparation (*vestibular*), and platforms like "*Me Salva*," which focus on exam questions, have greater effectiveness, especially for students intending to enter higher education. Comparing this to the "Life Project" component, she believes these tools are better utilized by the students.

Interviewee B stated that this type of content is necessary and highlighted that, although students have access to vast information on the internet, they struggle to discern what is most relevant. She emphasized that the teacher must act as a mediator, helping students filter this information and understand what is truly important. Despite being part of the technological era, many students lack basic skills such as opening or creating an email account, even while being fluent in games and social media.

According to Interviewee B, teachers need to guide students in practical aspects related to the labor market, including appropriate behavior in selection processes. For her, many young people predominantly consume content of immediate interest on social media, which reinforces the importance of school mediation in expanding their professional repertoires. When asked if such content is currently addressed in the classroom, she stated that it depends heavily on the teacher. Although the "Life Project" component addresses professional issues, its depth and scope are limited. She stressed that it is up to the teacher to take the initiative to look at the student in this regard, encouraging and guiding them on university entrance exams, explaining professional options, and sharing their own experience.

Furthermore, she noted that teachers with diverse experiences, such as having lived or studied outside the city or country, can contribute significantly, offering concrete examples of how to proceed in different situations. Thus, the interviewee reiterated that the depth of these contents varies from teacher to teacher; although references exist in the didactic material, they are not comprehensive enough to meet students' needs.

The statements from Interviewees A and B evidence a shared perception that students need more concrete guidance regarding their academic and professional trajectories. It is observed that the professional dimension is understood by the participants not only as a process of occupational choice but also as practical preparation for the transition between school and the world of work.

This understanding aligns with discussions on career guidance developed by Melo-Silva, Lassance, and Soares (2004), who advocate for expanding young people's access to information regarding opportunities for training and professional insertion. It

also dialogues with Lisboa (2017) by highlighting the importance of career guidance as a strategy for supporting youth in building life projects and social insertion.

At the same time, the interviewees point out limitations in the "Life Project" component, indicating that the effectiveness of these actions depends significantly on the individual initiative of teachers, which suggests a need for more consolidated guidelines for the development of this dimension in schools.

Interviewee C reported the experience of an elective course on entrepreneurship that addressed contents related to the world of work, labor rights, and professional communication, seeking to bring students closer to concrete situations experienced in the professional context. She further emphasized the integration of socio-emotional competencies in this process, acknowledging that these skills are equally indispensable. According to her, it is essential for students to learn how to deal with frustration, work in teams, develop organization, and replicate positive behaviors. The reported experience demonstrates that specific pedagogical initiatives can broaden students' understanding of the world of work. However, because they depend on the availability of elective courses and school initiatives, such actions do not guarantee equitable access for all students in the network.

Interviewee D considers it important to address content related to professional preparation in daily classroom life, including within the scope of the "Life Project." Although he highlights that the central focus of the "Life Project" is not exclusively professional, he acknowledges that professional fulfillment is a significant aspect for many students and that it is directly linked to the achievement of other goals, such as financial independence. According to him, preparation for the labor market can spark students' interest in the "Life Project" by connecting them with practical perspectives and career-related goals. Thus, integrating these discussions into the school context is viewed as positive and relevant.

Interviewee D's statement reinforces the understanding that the professional dimension plays a relevant role in the construction of students' life projects, even if it does not constitute their sole objective. This perception is aligned with the curricular component's proposal, which seeks to integrate different dimensions of human development. However, it is observed that preparation for professional life emerges as an element capable of providing meaning and practical applicability to the activities developed in the discipline, contributing to student engagement and the articulation between future expectations and school experiences.

Limits and Potentialities in the Application of Career Guidance

Based on the triangulation of the analyzed documentary materials, such as the "Life Project" Curricular Guidelines, the Currículo Paulista, and the slides provided by the CMSP, as well as the perceptions of the interviewed coordinators, it is possible to identify a series of limits and potentialities in how career guidance is being addressed in the "Life Project" curricular component in São Paulo state public schools.

Among the main limits, the generalist approach of the content present in the CMSP slides stands out. Although they cover relevant topics such as the labor market, career, higher education, and socio-emotional skills, they lack regional and sociocultural contextualization. This lack of personalization compromises students' identification with the proposed themes, making the teaching-learning process more distant from their realities.

Another limiting factor is the dependence on teacher intentionality. As pointed out in the interviews, the effectiveness of the professional dimension in "Life Project" classes varies considerably according to the engagement and personal experiences of the teachers. Furthermore, many teachers do not have specific training or complementary pedagogical resources to deepen discussions about the world of work in a practical and meaningful way.

Structural barriers are also evident, such as the lack of access to technological resources and adequate spaces for conducting activities like the "Career Fair." In schools with limited infrastructure, the more interactive and technological actions foreseen in the materials become difficult to implement, creating a mismatch between what is proposed and what is possible to achieve.

Despite these challenges, the research also revealed significant potentialities. The existence of a specific curricular component that includes career guidance already represents an advancement compared to previous contexts, in which such themes were treated marginally. Furthermore, local initiatives, such as elective subjects focused on entrepreneurship or preparation for university entrance exams and the labor market, demonstrate the capacity for adaptation and innovation in some schools, even in the face of limitations.

The coordinators' statements also indicate openness and interest in strengthening the professional dimension, provided there is greater institutional support, continuing education, and materials that dialogue with local specificities. The school appears, therefore, as a potent space to foster reflections on the future, stimulate autonomy, and support young people in the construction of their life projects.

In summary, career guidance, when addressed critically, contextually, and interdisciplinarily, can significantly contribute to student engagement and the construction of more conscious trajectories, especially in contexts marked by social inequalities. However, for this contribution to be effective, it is necessary to overcome the gaps between what is prescribed and what is practiced, recognizing the school's role as an active agent in preparing youth for the world of work and citizenship.

Conclusions

The results provide an understanding that the professional dimension within the "Life Project" component is primarily developed from an informative perspective oriented toward employability, centered on the presentation of careers, access to higher education, and preparation for the labor market. Although these aspects are important for students, a lesser emphasis was observed on processes of critical reflection regarding social inequalities, the determinants of professional choices, and the different possibilities for constructing life trajectories.

It is evident that there are challenges in implementing curricular guidelines in daily school life, as the interviewed coordinators pointed out that the effectiveness of actions related to the professional dimension may vary according to teachers' individual initiatives and the conditions available in each school.

Such evidence points to the need to strengthen the professional dimension of the "Life Project" through actions articulated between educational policies, teacher training, school infrastructure, and the promotion of career guidance strategies that consider local and regional contexts. The inclusion of content on real opportunities for labor market insertion, partnerships with local institutions, and practical activities can increase student engagement and contribute more effectively to their preparation for adult and professional life.

Thus, it is concluded that Career Guidance, although not consolidated as a mandatory public policy, constitutes an essential pedagogical instrument for promoting equity and building trajectories that are more conscious and aligned with young people's life projects. Its strengthening requires a more integrated and contextualized approach that takes into account the multiple challenges faced by public school students in Brazil.

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