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## RETHINKING YOUTHS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

This work aimed to problematize the school-youth-culture relationship. Therefore, the study of this work was conducted through a Literature Review. To this end, texts with approaches focused on cultural studies, youth and experience were visited. The study concluded that in order for the school to establish a dialogue with youth culture, it is necessary to pay attention to the student's experience.

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## INTRODUCTION

It seems that everyone has something to say about what it means to be young, from common sense to the most sophisticated scientific discourse. According to Groppo (2017), some of these voices can be heard in legal discourses, which demarcate the period of validity of youth (between 12-15 years as the beginning and 29 years as the end and beginning of adult life according to the Brazilian Statute of Youth); in the discourses of biology and medicine that have puberty and bodily transformations as strong milestones, in psychology, which highlights elements that involve the development of personality, and also in sociology, which in turn considers youth as "a phase of social life", a "social status", a "social category", a "historical category" (GROPPO, 2017, p. 13). These forms of summarized and provisional approaches are not being discredited here, but problematized since they tend to be part of the popular imagination, school, medical, political, scientific, often guiding, closing and delimiting youths (in the plural<sup>1</sup>) in youth (in the singular<sup>2</sup>), normalizing and normalizing concepts and standards of what "being young" means and should represent.

These standardizations more often end up serving as models for implementing public policies, designing projects, preparing curricula and textbooks, delimiting roles and social income, in addition to making prejudices, exclusions and the creation of difference. Other voices that are very present and, in a way, covered (socially and "academically") with authority to formulate representations and discourses about the juvenile condition rest at school. In this case, the school, being understood as a hyperonym for pedagogues, teachers and managers, promotes and strives to put into operation speeches that conceptualize what is "to be young", what "is not to be young" and how to "not is to be young" can reach the level of "being young". To do this, it first turns this young man into a student. By reducing or suppressing the juvenile condition of this student, it becomes easier to assess him/her, conceptualize him/her, and put him/her in his molds, leaving those who do not fit, exclusion, labeling, transfers and categorizations within the which is normal and abnormal. Roos (2007), in this perspective, points out psychopedagogy as a strong instrument for the creation of these normals and abnormal within the school environment, pointing out how the non-learning subject is understood. According to the author, "the norm is the result of a process of comparison, hierarchy, homogenization and exclusion to make everyone (or at least the majority) approach the concept of

<sup>1</sup> In portuguese: juventudes

<sup>2</sup> In portuguese: juventude

normal<sup>3</sup>”, (ROOS, 2007, p. 23). And in a way, in "pedagogical" terms, it is quite simple to get to know the school's normals, to start treating the different ones from them: students who "don't learn", those who don't "behave", those who don't participate in the activities that the school proposes. Most of the time, everything that goes beyond this must be disciplined to return or promote this student to normality, through corrective pedagogies, as if “the unadapted were failures of the pedagogical system<sup>4</sup>” (COUTINHO, 2010, p. 20).

## METHODS

This work aimed to problematize the school-youth-culture relationship. Therefore, the study of this work was conducted through a Literature Review. According to Santos and Candeloro (2006, p. 43), the Literature Review “is part of a research project, which explicitly reveals the universe of scientific contributions by authors on a specific topic”. To this end, texts with approaches focused on cultural studies, youth and experience were visited.

## DISCUSSION

Thus, it is increasingly interesting to “think of the school as a space and time of power relations [...] as a locus of subject governance, subjection, disciplining, regulation and discursive normalization<sup>5</sup>” (ROOS, 2007, p. 71), since acting in this way, the school not only builds or marks strangers, but also emerges as the legitimate institution to teach what it is and how the good student and the bad student are produced, explaining and classifying how the winning, successful student and what he/she needs; and with the same technique, the school points out the characteristics of the failed student and how he can be fixed or abandoned. As Larrosa (1994, p. 67) said, “the discursive procedures of enunciation create at the same time the subject and the object of the enunciation<sup>6</sup>”. They not only create, but they guarantee the reiteration of their propagation. Documents such as the curriculum or the "graduate profile" type can be identified as examples of this creation of the pattern of what it means to be a good student. In another text, Larrosa asks to what extent the school is not in charge of homogenizing all students, removing or at least preventing their inherent originality, novelty and creativity, raising the following discussion: "to what extent all education, understood as achievement of a project, it reduces the novelty of childhood in the sense that it brings it back to existing conditions and makes it deductible from what already existed<sup>7</sup>". (LARROSA, 2003, p. 190). Even though this text has disturbed the school's action on childhood, it seems that this reduction continues in the later stages with high school youth. Would the teacher be one of those responsible for ensuring this homogenization? Later in the same text, Larrosa identifies three types of subjects involved in “a meeting”, which I refer here to the formal educational scenery between teacher and student.

the subject of recognition is the one who is unable to see anything other than himself, the one who perceives what he encounters based on what he wants, what he knows, what he imagines, what he needs, what he expects. The subject of appropriation is the one who devours everything he finds [...]. But the subject of the experience is the one who knows how to face the other while the other is willing to lose his footing and let himself fall and be dragged by the one who meets him. The subject of the experience

is willing to transform himself in an unknown direction, (LARROSA, 2003, p. 197)<sup>8</sup>.

Walking towards youth culture does not mean capturing it and/or didacticizing it, but it represents the attempt to establish dialogues and connections between it and the school contents, to try to understand or get closer to the student, expanding the way of seeing him/her not just as a student, but as a young person. Cultural studies can provide subsidies for thinking about youth through a bias that takes into account the possibility of multiple identities of these young people, which denaturalizes the chronologization and institutionalization of the course of life, putting under erasure the lines that delimit the entrances and exits of these 'phases'. And for that, “the importance of taking the idea of youth in its plural form – youths – has been recurrent due to the diversity of existential situations that affect the subjects<sup>9</sup>” (SPÓSITO; CARRANO, 2007, p. 180), considering that they are the possibilities of “living the youth” are diverse (GROOPO, 2017, p. 17). According to Vargas and Xavier (2016), when analyzed from the perspective of Cultural Studies, the concept of youth assumes the idea of a plural category, thus not having a single way of description, since the subjects are not “unified entities, but constituted discursively<sup>10</sup>” (VARGAS and XAVIER, 2016, p. 281). Through Cultural Studies, the understandings established as normal are questioned, and the process of making these youths is problematized, taking up other concepts to debate the constitution of these subjects and their subjectivities.

Obviously, pedagogical, biological or psychological concepts for this construction are not being denied, but the meanings of this construction are now centered on culture (HALL, 1997) rather than closed in the body or in the school grade in which the subject finds himself, once that the concepts of what it means to be young are not given naturally, but are culturally and historically attributed and constituted through language and the representations that it produces (HALL, 2016; SILVA, 2014; WOODWARD, 2014), being “by through the representation that our identities acquire meaning<sup>11</sup>” (MELO and GUIZZO, 2019, p. 125). In this sense, Dayrell (2003) understands that youth is at the same time a social condition and a type of representation. Thus, it is important to start looking at youth through historical and cultural criteria, in which young people, as subjects, “love, suffer, have fun, think about their conditions and their life experiences, position themselves, have desires and proposals for improvement of life<sup>12</sup>” (DAYRELL, 2003, p. 43). To better understand this juvenile condition, Dayrell (2007) presents us with some important points for its understanding, of which we highlight three: first, the “cultural forms of expression”, such as music, dances, videos, bodies, videos, as well as the production of these expressions appear as “a privileged space of practices, representations, ritual symbols, in which young people seek to demarcate a youthful identity<sup>13</sup>” Dayrell (2007, p. 1110). The second point, “sociability”, appears as another dimension of the juvenile condition, providing environments for exchanging ideas, leisure, entertainment or participation in more formal communities such as work, school. It also tends to occur in a “daily flow” between obligations or in free time, according to the author (2007, p. 1111), sociability “seems to respond to their needs for communication, solidarity, democracy, autonomy, affective exchanges and, above all, identity<sup>14</sup>”.

<sup>8</sup>o sujeito do reconhecimento é aquele que não é capaz de ver outra coisa senão a si mesmo, aquele que percebe o que lhe vai ao encontro a partir do que quer, do que sabe, do que imagina, do que necessita, do que deseja, do que espera. O sujeito da apropriação é aquele que devora tudo o que encontra [...]. Mas o sujeito da experiência é aquele que sabe enfrentar o outro enquanto que outro e está disposto a perder o pé e a se deixar tomar e arrastar por aquele que lhe vai ao encontro. O sujeito da experiência está disposto a se transformar numa direção desconhecida.

<sup>9</sup>tem sido recorrente a importância de se tomar a idéia de juventude em seu plural – juventudes – em virtude da diversidade de situações existenciais que afetam os sujeitos

<sup>10</sup>entidades unificadas, mas constituídos discursivamente.

<sup>11</sup>por meio da representação que nossas identidades adquirem sentido.

<sup>12</sup>amam, sofrem, divertem-se pensam a respeito de suas condições e de suas experiências de vida, posicionam-se, possuem desejos e propostas de melhoria de vida

<sup>13</sup>um espaço privilegiado de práticas, representações, símbolos rituais, no qual os jovens buscam demarcar uma identidade juvenil.

<sup>14</sup>parece responder às suas necessidades de comunicação, de solidariedade, de democracia, de autonomia, de trocas afetivas e, principalmente, de identidade.

<sup>3</sup>a norma é o resultado de um processo de comparação, hierarquização, homogeneização e exclusão para fazer com que todos (ou pelo menos a maioria) se aproximem do conceito de normal.

<sup>4</sup>os inadaptados fossem falhas do sistema pedagógico.

<sup>5</sup>pensar a escola enquanto espaço e tempo de relações de poder [...] enquanto locus de governo do sujeito, de sujeição, de disciplinarização, de regulação e de normalização discursiva

<sup>6</sup>os procedimentos discursivos da enunciabilidade criam ao mesmo tempo o sujeito e o objeto da enunciação

<sup>7</sup>até que ponto toda educação, entendida como a realização de um projeto, reduz a novidade da infância no sentido em que a reconduz às condições existentes e a faz dedutível daquilo que já existia

The last point highlighted here refers to the “time and space” dimension, it is a place where affective and symbolic experiences are shared, where meetings, parties, events, classes, family and religious events are lived. The author also addresses important topics for discussion such as “work”, (this being a frequent theme in the speeches of the young people he interviewed in Dayrell (2003); “class crossings”, and the school space. Vargas and Xavier (2016), based on Severo (2014), highlight that youth for some people may be linked to consumption, a state of mind or body condition. Margulis (1996), in turn, highlights that being young depends on vital credit, social class and gender, with the youth period being likely to be “shorter” in popular sectors and “longer” in the middle and upper classes. For the author, youth is socially and culturally articulated with age and with the vital moratorium. Vargas and Xavier (2016), Vargas (2015); Groppo(2017), Dayrell(2003) return to the concept of moratorium to explain that this period corresponds to a time in which young people with favorable economic conditions would have the opportunity to postpone responsibilities and life situations identified as belonging to the world adult, such as: work, raising a family, children, financial responsibility, to go through moments of experimentation without worry instead. This social tolerance would make it possible for young people to be less demanding and freer to enjoy their youth.

Through the above approaches, it is possible to see the need to rethink our view of high school youths, giving visibility to their culture and experiences. For Larrosa (2002, p. 21) the experience has a singular importance in the individual's life, as it refers to something “that happens to us”, an event external to the subject that does not depend on him, but touches him, the subject is the place of experience. This subject, defined here as a student, brings a huge range of cultural crossings that allow us to infer that their experiences produce different types of knowledge, productive for the teacher. But the excessive objectivity of the school has weighed on the student the need to accumulate information, not allowing this subject to think about what was extracted from this experience. Thus, the experience ends up being understood only as “what went through”, “what the student lived”, and when it comes to the way the school is organized in the neoliberal context, as “what the student learned to use in the labor market”, a concept that differs from what Larrosa (2002) proposes.

We believe that within the school environment, several things touch students during the long time they spend at high school: friendships, romances, events, achievements, victories and defeats, teachers and professionals. In general, the experiences related to school cultural practices affect students much more than the contents of the curricular components, probably because these experiences are directly linked to the youth cultures in which these students are inserted, different from the curricular contents, which in most cases, do not come close to the interests of these young people (DAYRELL, 2007; VARGAS, 2015). This may lead us to reflect that perhaps the students' experiences are not considered by the school and the teachers, that the experiences of the world outside the school are not brought into this formal teaching environment, or that they do not find bridges to be collated there and contemplated. According to Vargas (2015)

It is possible to think that we find in contemporaneity, youths who build their knowledge in different places: on the streets, in the media, on social networks, among others. In other words, the knowledge constituted by young people, especially those located in urban spaces, does not only occur in the family and at school<sup>15</sup> (VARGAS, 2015, p. 57).

However, the school has neglected learning based on social practice, focusing teaching, most of the time, on teaching rules and searching for the “right” answers. Santomé (1995) calls our attention to the fact that

school programs and, therefore, teachers who reject or do not grant recognition to popular culture and, more specifically, to the cultural forms of childhood and youth (cinema, rock and roll, rap, comics, etc.) as a vehicle for communication of their visions of reality and, therefore, as something significant for the students, they are missing a wonderful opportunity to take advantage of the cultural content and interests that these people have as a basis from which to start their daily work in the classroom<sup>16</sup> (SANTOMÉ, 1995, p. 165).

That is why it is important to listen to the students, to have access to their experiences, to the way their youth culture is articulated with what is taught in the current classroom, (or if it is not articulated).

## CONCLUSION

In order for the school to establish a dialogue with youth culture, it is necessary to pay attention to the student's experience and to the voice of these subjects. It means blurring the boundaries so naturalized between the teacher's authority over the student, to perceive this student as someone who is part of the curricular process. For this, according to Larrosa (2002, p. 24) it is necessary

a gesture of interruption, a gesture that is almost impossible these days: it requires stopping to think, stopping to look, stopping to listen, thinking slower, looking slower, and listening more slowly; stop to feel, feel more slowly, dwell on details, suspend opinion, suspend judgment, suspend will, suspend the automatism of action, cultivate attention and delicacy, open your eyes and ears, talk about what it happens to us, learning to be slow, listening to others, cultivating the art of meeting, keeping quiet, being patient and giving yourself time and space<sup>16</sup>.

There is a lot to investigate when it comes to teaching and learning relationships present in the multiple dimensions of life and experience, and it is necessary to explore the pedagogical qualities of social life (ANDRADE and COSTA, 2015), as social practices, the media, the technologies, education and other artifacts that the student can make use of contribute to the construction of subjectivities, thus being productive to be problematized and studied with the same importance as other topics privileged in the school context.

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<sup>15</sup>É possível pensar que encontramos na contemporaneidade, juventudes que constroem seus saberes em lugares diversificados: nas ruas, nas mídias, nas redes sociais, entre outros. Ou seja, os saberes constituídos pelos jovens, em especial por aqueles que estão situados em espaços urbanos, não ocorre somente na família e na escola

<sup>16</sup>um gesto de interrupção, um gesto que é quase impossível nos tempos que correm: requer parar para pensar, parar para olhar, parar para escutar, pensar mais devagar, olhar mais devagar, e escutar mais devagar; parar para sentir, sentir mais devagar, demorar-se nos detalhes, suspender a opinião, suspender o juízo, suspender a vontade, suspender o automatismo da ação, cultivar a atenção e a delicadeza, abrir os olhos e os ouvidos, falar sobre o que nos acontece, aprender a lentidão, escutar aos outros, cultivar a arte do encontro, calar muito, ter paciência e dar-se tempo e espaço.

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