

Latencies and powers in the life histories of students from the peripheral region of Alvorada/RS

Latências e potências nas histórias de vida de estudantes da região periférica de Alvorada/RS

Latencias y potencias en las historias de vida de estudiantes de la región periférica de Alvorada/RS

Natálie dos Reis Rodrigues^I

Jaqueline Moll^{II}

ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand the life and schooling trajectories of peripheral and multi-repeating young students from a school in Alvorada/RS. The context of the study was the basic education state school (EEEB) Gentil Viegas Cardoso, and the participants were six former students from that school who participated in the Trajetórias Criativas flow correction program. As an instrument, a semi-structured interview was used. The analysis of the interviewees' life stories suggests that, despite their singularities, they have the negligence of public authorities in common. Situations of social vulnerability made the educational process difficult, but even those students who had stable economic and family conditions failed at school. It is concluded that the trajectories are unique and depend on several factors that favor or hinder success. However, the form of violence and abandonment present in all reports is that suffered as a consequence of the school system, denouncing the system itself as causing such failure.

Keywords: Life Stories. School Failure. Peripheral Youth. Creative Trajectories. Educational System.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa teve como objetivo conhecer as trajetórias de vida e de escolarização de jovens periféricos e multirrepetentes de uma escola de Alvorada/RS. O contexto do estudo foi a escola estadual de educação básica (EEEB) Gentil Viegas Cardoso, e os participantes eram seis ex-estudantes da referida escola que participaram do programa de correção de fluxo Trajetórias Criativas. Como instrumento, foi utilizada uma entrevista semiestruturada. A análise das histórias de vida dos entrevistados sugere que, apesar das singularidades, elas têm em comum a negligência do poder público. As situações de vulnerabilidade social dificultaram o processo educativo, porém mesmo aqueles que possuíam condições econômicas e familiares estáveis fracassaram na escola. Conclui-se que as trajetórias são únicas e dependem de diversos fatores que favorecem ou dificultam o

^IPrefeitura de Cachoeirinha, Cachoeirinha, RS, Brazil. Email: natyreisrodrigues@gmail.com  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5303-6686>

^{II}Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. Email: jaquelinemoll@gmail.com  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5465-178X>

sucesso. Entretanto, a forma de violência e abandono presente em todos os relatos é a sofrida em decorrência do sistema escolar, denunciando o próprio sistema como causador de tal fracasso.

Palavras-chave: Histórias de Vida. Fracasso Escolar. Jovem Periférico. Trajetórias Criativas. Sistema Educacional.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo comprender las trayectorias de vida y de escolarización de jóvenes periféricos y multirepetitivos de una escuela de Alvorada/RS. El contexto del estudio es la EEEB Gentil Viegas Cardoso y los participantes son seis exalumnos de esa escuela que participaron del programa de corrección de flujo Trajetórias Criativas. Como instrumento se utilizó una entrevista semiestructurada. El análisis de las historias de vida de los entrevistados sugiere que, a pesar de sus singularidades, tienen en común la negligencia de las autoridades públicas. Situaciones de vulnerabilidad social dificultaron el proceso educativo, sin embargo, incluso quienes tenían condiciones económicas y familiares estables fracasaron en la escuela. Se concluye que las trayectorias son únicas y dependen de varios factores que favorecen o dificultan el éxito. Sin embargo, la forma de violencia y abandono presente en todos los informes es la que sufre el sistema escolar, denunciando que el propio sistema es el causante de dicho fracaso.

Palabras clave: Historias de Vida. Fracaso Escolar. Jóvenes Periféricos. Trayectorias Creativas. Sistema Educacional.

INTRODUCTION

People living in peripheral communities have historically been silenced and subjected to violence. Amplifying the voices of young people in this context is a methodological choice that can reveal not only unique life trajectories but also what they share in common.

The very way of thinking about the dialogue between the individual and the sociocultural context takes on new contours, because the researcher, when examining the data produced within the subjects' narratives, faces the challenge of understanding these stories not only in terms of their specificities, but also by considering what is "shared" with the stories of other subjects (Burnier *et al.*, 2007, p. 346).

Understanding what, in fact, constitutes a social class and the limits it imposes is fundamental to refuting the deceitful and cruel discourse of meritocracy:

After all, without reconstructing the class prehistory of each of us, we have only individuals competing on equal terms for the scarce goods and resources disputed in society. Everything was very deserved and fair. Without the idea of class and the unveiling of the injustices it produces from birth, we have the perfect legitimation for the fraud of the competitive individual's individual meritocracy (Souza, 2019, p. 91).

Although vulnerability does not determine outcomes, it may contribute to low school performance, age-grade distortion, and dropout (Brasil, 2009). Souza (2019) emphasizes that success or failure in life depends on privileged (or not) access to three types of capital: economic capital:

an individual's purchasing power; cultural capital: the incorporation by the individual of useful or prestigious knowledge; social capital of personal relations: personal relations guided by interest and/or affection that represent some advantage in competition for scarce resources for those who possess them. Access to all types of capital must be considered to fully understand the phenomenon of inequality.

Regarding the role of education in the face of social inequality, a document prepared by the Ministry of Education states:

An analysis of social inequalities, encompassing both the problems of income distribution and the contexts of deprivation of freedom, is required for formulating the proposal for Integral Education. [...] From this perspective, a broader conceptual framework is needed so that the negotiation of an agenda for educational quality considers the value of differences, according to ethnic belonging, gender awareness, sexual orientation, ages, and geographic origins (Brasil, 2009, p. 10).

Against this backdrop, the research context involves students from a state public school in Alvorada, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The municipality is considered the most violent in the Porto Alegre metropolitan region and was ranked the sixth most violent in Brazil in 2017 (Ipea; FBSP, 2019). The school in question is one of the largest in the state and showed high rates of students with age-grade distortion. For this reason, it was invited to participate as one of the pioneers of the *Trajetórias Criativas* Program (TC), whose objective was to rebuild the relationship that young students with multiple grade repetitions keep with learning and with the school and, thus, aid their progression to Brazilian upper secondary education (*ensino médio*) (Brasil, 2014).

The Program emerged from a partnership between the Ministry of Education and professors from the Laboratory School (Colégio de Aplicação) of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and was later transformed into a public policy of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (despite having been discontinued by the state government in 2019). Its purpose was to promote the progression of students with multiple grade repetitions who had been retained in basic education (*ensino fundamental*), through a differentiated methodology that fostered authorship, autonomy, protagonism, and creativity among those involved.

The methodological proposal was created from a logic different from traditional schooling. The authors suggest five pathways (*trajetórias*) — open pedagogical proposals adaptable to each school's context — while indicating that teachers and students may also create their own pathways. The content addressed in these pathways emerges from a triggering activity, and all curricular components address the same topic in class. In addition to the common curricular components, the curriculum includes scientific initiation (*iniciação científica*), in which the student chooses a topic of interest, and interdisciplinary activities, moments in which two or more teachers join to explore a topic together in class.

Teachers have fewer groups while maintaining the same workload as regular schooling, which enables deeper knowledge of the students with whom they interact and time to enhance the teaching-learning process. In addition, weekly planning meetings allow the teaching team to interact, create, and assess the progress of classes.

There is also a working partnership among the university, the education network, the school, families, and students, in which each party becomes co-responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the activities developed. Participation is free and voluntary, and students remain in the Program for one to three years.

Understanding the general characteristics of the participants' context and the oppressive structure that acts upon them, the theoretical propositions listed here are: school failure in Brazil is

conceived, constructed, planned, and structured by Brazilian educational policies; grade retention in Brazil is a mechanism of social selection; there is a relationship between school failure and Brazil's map of violence; a large share of the young people who are murdered in the country share the same skin color and social class.

To discuss these ideas based on the interviewees' accounts, the following research objective was defined: to understand the life trajectories and, consequently, the schooling trajectories of peripheral youth with multiple grade repetitions from a school in Alvorada, Rio Grande do Sul.

METHODOLOGY

This study is part of a doctoral dissertation developed as a requirement for obtaining the title of Doctor in Science Education in the Graduate Program in Science Education at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. The dissertation investigates the life histories of youth from peripheral communities marked by school failure.

The investigation is characterized as qualitative using a multiple-case study (Yin, 2015), in which each interviewed student constitutes a case. The research setting is the Professor Gentil Viegas Cardoso State Basic Education School (Escola Estadual de Educação Básica Professor Gentil Viegas Cardoso), located in the municipality of Alvorada, Rio Grande do Sul. The study participants were six young former students of the institution who participated in the TC Program between 2011 and 2019.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted from December 2022 to June 2023. The results were analyzed, systematized, and transformed into narratives about each participant's life history, based on the narrative approaches of Patto (1993) and Souza (2018).

Regarding procedures and ethical safeguards, the study followed the guidelines of Resolution 510/2016 of the Research Ethics Committee. Participants' identities are protected through the use of pseudonyms and the suppression of any other information that might identify the interviewee. The names chosen are a posthumous tribute to major Brazilian figures who inspire educational work and the struggle for equity, in the order they appear in the text: Milton (Milton Santos), Carolina (Carolina Maria de Jesus), Abdias (Abdias Nascimento), Anísio (Anísio Teixeira), Maria (Maria Nilde Mascellani), and Paulo (Paulo Freire).

The findings describe the life trajectories of each participant, totaling six narratives. The text is organized as follows: the gestational period and early childhood; the family environment; conditions of access to culture and the economic situation; the schooling trajectory, participation in the TC, and progression to the Brazilian upper secondary education, concluding with current activities and future plans.

MILTON'S STORY

Milton is a Black man aged 25, the oldest among the interviewees. The child of a relationship between cousins, he reports that, despite the genetic risks, his pregnancy was planned and his birth was uneventful. His parents were married, and his childhood was very peaceful. He lived with his parents and his sister, who was five years older. His mother, a teacher, always encouraged him and paid for a football school, something he loved. They lived in a good house, with each child having their own bedroom, in a relatively quiet neighborhood called Algarve, in Alvorada. Once, he was robbed on his way to school, but it was the only episode of violence he experienced in the neighborhood.

Regarding his schooling, he attended three schools. In the first, he had difficulties relating to classmates who mocked him because of speech problems, for which he underwent speech therapy for two years. He became withdrawn and was unable to progress. As a result, he failed a grade for the first time in the fourth grade.

He arrived at Gentil School in fifth grade at age 12/13. It was a turbulent period, as the school was under renovation, and this instability affected him in some way. On the first day, he had a conflict with a peer that landed him in the principal's office. The fight was over a nickname that demeaned Milton's facial features: "I have a nickname. People know me as 'nego beíço' (a Black man with big lips). In fact, he was the one who started saying 'negão beíçudo', and I didn't like it."

In the sixth grade, he failed again, although he cannot say why. In the seventh grade, he would have failed once more, but halfway through the school year he was invited to take part in a program for students with age-grade distortion: TC. It was the TC's first year at the school, so it was new for everyone. Accordingly, there was an adjustment period for the school, teachers, students, and families. Initially, he did not want to participate because he would have to distance himself from classmates in his original group. However, his mother insisted and told him to accept because it would work out.

His mother, in fact, was always the primary supporter of his studies. He had many books at home. When he failed grades, she would "punish" him: "No Play [Station]. The whole year without the Play. Since I really liked playing football, she started taking that away too: 'if you do well, we'll go and do it again. If you don't, you'll focus on school for one more year.'"

Moreover, his relationship with football began early. He attended several football schools and teams. Like most boys of his generation, he dreamed of becoming a professional player, but, unfortunately, he was unable to make it happen.

In his second year in the TC, his mother died of an aneurysm. His father remarried after some time, and Milton had a good relationship with his stepmother. Nevertheless, his mother's death deeply affected him and was reflected in his studies. Today, he notes that, if he could, he would change the topic of his scientific initiation project, which at the time was about football, and would speak about his mother instead.

A fighter, right. She never let us lack anything. In her own way, she fulfilled all my wishes. I was always attached to her. Always glued to her. The school there closed, and she found a way. She would have had to renew her pedagogy degree, something like that, and she didn't. Then she started looking for work, cleaning houses.

What made the difference so that he did not give up studying during this difficult period was the teachers' affection:

And when it happened to my mom, I shut down. [...] I didn't even want to come to school anymore. One day, I was up there in the square with a friend who also did Trajetórias, just hanging out. Then, the teacher "R" passed by and said, "What are you doing there, kid?" She was already going to scold her for skipping class. I said, "Oh, teacher, I don't feel like going to class." "What happened?" I told her what had happened. She brought me to school, talked to me, all the teachers talked to me, and they didn't let me quit. And they were always very much my friends.

He was considered a standout among the school's TC cohorts at the time and was chosen to represent the school at a youth seminar in Brasília. The event included interactive talks and activities for youth from across the country, with all expenses covered. He believes he was selected because of his change in attitude: he was relating well to his peers, dedicating himself to activities, and "doing everything properly." The experience was so intense that he called his family and said he would stay there to live.

Milton, who had previously felt excluded, began to understand what was being taught, and after progressing to upper secondary education, he did not experience difficulties and never failed

again. However, the outcome could have been different: he believes he would have dropped out if he had not been welcomed by the TC teaching staff: “I would have. I don’t think I was ever a bad person. It’s just that I was very attached [to my mother]. And here they didn’t let me get lost; they always welcomed me, tirelessly.”

Later in the interview, he recounts that his father died in 2021 from COVID-19. Because he had comorbidities, even with treatment through private health insurance, he did not survive while waiting for the vaccine, which became available about two months after his death. A retired public servant, he was working as an app-based driver and did not “want” (or could not?) stop during the pandemic.

Today, Milton places great value on family. He works in formal employment (with a registered work contract) as a network electrician, having completed a building electrician course during his military service. After leaving the Army, he worked as an app-based driver for a period. He finds physical education interesting, but does not intend to pursue higher education. His efforts are focused on renovating and expanding the house his father left as an inheritance, as he wants to live there with his wife, his two stepdaughters, and the child they plan to have.

CAROLINA’S STORY

Carolina is a Black young woman aged 19. She has lived almost her entire life in the same place, close to the school. When her mother was 21, she was surprised to discover the pregnancy only at around six months of gestation. It was a shock. Carolina is her mother’s only child. Her father, who left home when she was two, has another child younger than Carolina.

After her father’s abandonment, Carolina was raised by her mother, grandmother, aunt, and uncle. Everyone in the family contributed to household expenses: the grandmother, in addition to caring for Carolina, did cleaning jobs; the uncle worked in a hotel and the aunt, in a clinic; the mother worked in a clothing store as a salesperson and as a delivery worker. Currently, the mother receives benefits from the National Institute of Social Security (Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social — INSS), but needs additional work as a manicurist to improve the family’s living conditions.

Assuming sole responsibility for Carolina’s upbringing, despite family support, her mother worked hard to meet all of her daughter’s needs, as reported:

My mother fought a lot to raise me. Including so that I wouldn’t miss him [my father]. Because the paternal side makes a big difference. [...] it was quite difficult; at one point in my life, I went into depression. [...] I would still chase after him to get his attention, you know? But then I grew up and matured, and I realized it wasn’t worth it.

Carolina’s depression appears to have been triggered by the difficulty of understanding her father’s emotional abandonment. In addition, he contributed little financially to his daughter’s expenses over her life, sending some money “when a light would go on in him...” More recently, he had been helping to pay for a course for his daughter, but stopped because she reached adulthood. Without the financial means to pay the tuition without her father’s support, Carolina had to stop taking the course.

Her schooling began turbulently. As a shy girl, she had difficulty making friends. Teachers noticed learning difficulties, informed the family, and thus attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and anxiety were diagnosed. She underwent medication treatment for a period, as well as psychological follow-up, which she intends to resume as soon as possible.

Carolina recounts that teachers adopted some flexible measures due to ADHD and anxiety:

Yeah, teachers would always give me a bit more time to study for tests. When I couldn't take the test, I would get very nervous. Then it was like, "I studied so much, and I can't even do the test!."

She also received extra tutoring at school and psychological support when needed, as during a period when she suffered bullying. Despite this important support, she states that many teachers saw what was happening and did nothing to stop verbal aggression. They even called the peer who initiated the conflicts (and encouraged others to do the same) to talk, but it did not solve the problem. According to Carolina, the reasons for the verbal aggression were:

because I was the tall one at school and I was chubby. Then they called me all kinds of things. And also, I was that kid, that teenager, pre-teen, who didn't really like those jokes. I would stay quieter in my corner.

Regarding grade repetition, it occurred twice: in the third and sixth years of basic education. In the third, she had difficulties with reading and writing, and her mother requested that she repeat the year, believing she was not prepared to move forward:

She went to the Education Secretariat to talk, to explain why. She brought the doctor's report explaining why I had to repeat because I couldn't read or write very well. It was even better because I improved a lot in writing and reading.

The sixth-year repetition occurred because she was unmotivated to attend classes due to the bullying she suffered. She missed many classes and, when she attended, did not complete the assignments requested by teachers.

Carolina's mother, who completed Brazilian upper secondary education, is her main supporter in school, helping with homework and bringing extra activities. However, the mother-daughter relationship was turbulent since childhood:

My mom and I fought a lot. Because I was a rebellious pre-teen, right? So I wanted to do certain things she didn't allow, and I didn't understand why, and I would question her, and then we ended up fighting. [...] And also because of my father. I said I wanted to live with him, and she said it wasn't possible because he had abandoned me. There was also a time when she left... not left, but she got a job offer. She went to Santa Catarina, and that affected me a lot. That made me very angry.

The girl, who had already been abandoned by her father, saw her mother move to another state and leave her "behind." These family issues affected Carolina emotionally and, consequently, affected her school life. Regarding another relevant topic, racism, Carolina says she never experienced it, but recalls a specific episode that also occurred at school:

I never suffered racism; you know? But in the fourth year, [...] I cried because a classmate bullied me about my skin color. I didn't know if... I didn't really understand. I didn't know if that was racism or, I don't know, a joke, but then I started crying. I told my teacher I didn't want to be Black, that I wanted to be white. Even bringing that up, I think it was racism, but because I was a child, I didn't understand. So that was the only moment; then after that... [...] Yes, I accept myself as I am, because we have to accept ourselves. There's nothing to do.

Despite all difficulties at school, Carolina remembers it fondly:

So, since school was one of the moments that were important in my life, I'm going to say it was amazing. Because I had a lot of cool things, you know? I went on trips. I went to the zoo — the first time I went was with the school, you know? To the swimming pools, too, I went with the school. So, there were a lot of trips that helped me evolve, too, to make friends.

However, it was not always like this: “Until I met Trajetórias, I didn't have any good memories. But after I joined Trajetórias, I had many good memories.” TC was a turning point in her life, and she remained in the Program for two years. Afterward, she progressed to upper secondary education and completed it without repeating any grades.

Today, she cares for her grandmother, who has Alzheimer's disease, and takes free courses on topics of interest. Despite difficulties finding a job and financial constraints that temporarily prevent her from achieving her dreams, Carolina would not change anything in her life, because:

I'm kind of discovering strengths in myself that I didn't even know I had, to achieve things. To get courses, work, and to go after it. So today I'm a better person than before, back in my childhood and my pre-adolescence.

The introspective girl who struggled at school and attempted suicide on two occasions became much more communicative; she nurtures dreams of continuing her studies, shows interest in several fields such as photography, programming, and veterinary medicine.

ABDIAS'S STORY

Abdias is a Black young man aged 19 whose trajectory is marked by adversity, especially financial hardship. For most of his life, he lived in the same neighborhood as Gentil School, which he considers very good despite robberies and crime, because it has everything one needs nearby: a square, a health clinic, and a market that provides many jobs.

Regarding family composition, parental abandonment is again present. His mother stopped studying in fifth grade after becoming pregnant. Abdias, who does not even know his father's name, grew up with his mother, brother, grandmother, and uncle, who plays the paternal role. The father's absence is not felt, as he states, “I didn't even need him, because I had a family close by to encourage me.”

School life began at six years old, but in the third year, the first-grade repetition occurred. The family had to move to a different city due to financial hardship, and Abdias could not attend school because he needed to help the family budget by collecting aluminum cans. After returning to Alvorada, another repetition occurred in the fifth year under the same circumstances.

In addition to low school attendance, he recalls difficulties in mathematics and Portuguese and attributes them to being constantly worried about his family: “My classes were great, but I was always thinking ‘how is my family doing out there?’, so I had difficulty.”

Abdias's living conditions and those of his family explain this concern. He reports situations of clothing scarcity, such as going to school in flip-flops on cold days. He also reports selling candy at traffic lights and doing juggling. At times, he could not earn enough money even to eat. When asked what it is like to be hungry, he replies: “It's horrible! I don't wish it on anyone. Because it's horrible to see something, want to buy it, and not have money.”

Even under extreme poverty, he did not give in to proposals involving criminal activity, because he felt that was not for him. He preferred to “keep his head down and study.” Nevertheless, guilt and shame about being older than his peers were present in his life.

Until his path crossed with the TC. He was invited in the sixth year to attend Program classes. He stayed for one year, progressed to upper secondary education, and no longer had difficulties learning.

According to Abdias, participation in the TC was revolutionary and prevented his involvement in illicit activities: “I think I would have gotten involved with wrong things already. Trajetórias came and changed my life!” For him, the Program’s distinctive feature is the good relationship with peers and teachers, who explained the content as many times as necessary. The field trips were his favorite part, especially those involving research, such as the Museum of Science and Technology of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS). His favorite subjects are science and physical education.

What is most striking in Abdias’s story is his remarkable resilience and refusal to give up amid misery. Despite setbacks, he took school seriously, did not fool around in class, and always respected his teachers. Having never had books at home, he decided to help care for the school library:

Yeah, I came because I wanted to. Because then I could read the books. If there was a word I didn’t know, I would go there and write it down. And I always liked writing too.

In addition, whenever the school needs something, he is ready to help because he feels deep gratitude toward the place that, for him, always meant being welcomed, even during grade repetition, when teachers always offered advice. He assumes sole responsibility for the failed grades, because he did not study enough and chose to move with his family to another city to work rather than stay in Alvorada with relatives and study.

Currently, he works as a barber from Monday to Saturday. Usually, he works from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., but at times, he stays until midnight if there are many clients. Even if he wanted to dedicate himself only to studies, he could not, because his salary makes a significant difference in the family’s finances. His mother cannot work because she cares for his autistic brother. The family budget includes his salary, his uncle’s salary, and his grandmother’s income; she is 59 and still works as a cleaner. Financial hardship still greatly disrupts his plans: he had an opportunity to play football in Europe, but could not go because he lacked money for the plane ticket.

The boy, who is the result of a solo teenage pregnancy, who has experienced hunger, and who repeated grades twice because he needed to work and contribute financially, now thinks about becoming a football player or a police officer and building a family. For his future children, the advice he would give is “study a lot, have lots of goals, and work a lot.” He is still unsure whether he will continue studying, but dreams of providing better living conditions for his family.

ANÍSIO’S STORY

Anísio is a white young man aged 22. His pregnancy was somewhat complicated because his mother had pre-eclampsia, but in the end, everything went well. She and his father were married and already had two children when Anísio was born. Due to the death of an aunt, two of Anísio’s cousins moved in with the family, bringing the total to five children and two adults.

The house where they lived had three bedrooms: one for the couple, one for the three girls, and one for the two boys. He always had his basic needs met: food, clothing, and a comfortable home. The neighborhood was Passo do Feijó, farther from Gentil School. According to Anísio, the area is somewhat dangerous, but his street is a dead end, which provides more tranquility and opportunities for neighborhood children to socialize.

His mother, a teacher, always worked a great deal and, at times, the older sister was responsible for caring for the house and siblings, especially because his brother is a person with disability (*pessoa*

com deficiência — PCD) and requires care. His father, an industrial mechanic, completed basic education. His mother managed school-related matters. His father, however, played an important role in awakening the boy's curiosity.

Curiosity has been a characteristic of Anísio from early on, along with an entrepreneurial mindset. As a child, he built kites with bamboo sticks he cut himself, built tree houses, made knives, bought marbles at a certain price and resold them for a higher price, offered his father's beer to his mother's friends, and charged for it. He showed initiative to earn his own money, but did so as a hobby, not because he needed to work and contribute to the household budget.

Even so, Anísio faced setbacks in school. Initially, he studied at Gentil School but was transferred to a unit closer to home, and did not adapt well. He ended up repeating grades in the second and fifth years.

It's that because I had a speech problem, the teachers didn't really, how can I say, welcome me. They left me to fend for myself, and in Portuguese tests, those things were very hard for me; there were certain words I wrote the way I spoke. Then I got a lot wrong, and they didn't even support me or talk to me. But since I was little, I did speech therapy.

He believes that his difficulty in the language area, especially in Portuguese, is linked to his speech disorder. Even in adulthood, he shows some difficulty pronouncing certain words, even after speech therapy.

Another issue was the difficulty he had making friends, because he was very introspective, and also "the" son of an energetic vice-principal whom most people disliked and/or feared. At times, he felt people approached him out of self-interest, seeking to gain advantages from the fact that he was her son, which made building friendships even more difficult. At other times, he felt protected by teachers for the same reason.

However, upon entering the TC, the scenario changed. Teachers treated everyone equally. Regarding his language difficulties, he benefited because the Portuguese teacher was very attentive to students and invested in various strategies to optimize the classes.

Another point he highlights is the affective closeness between teachers and students. The bond was so meaningful that Anísio cried when remembering two TC teachers who unfortunately passed away. One of them had been directly affected by federal policies of educational underfunding at the time: "Bolsonaro started cutting teachers' funding, and he started getting depressed. He tried to kill himself several times. Until he managed to hang himself."

He also reports another teacher who fell into depression in the same period. He visits her annually to encourage her to recover and cherishes affectionate memories of all TC teachers. Despite the short time in the Program compared with his entire schooling (only one year), it was significant enough for him to remember it fondly and maintain contact with some teachers to this day.

Unfortunately, Anísio faced difficulties readapting to regular schooling in upper secondary education. He could not keep up with the content for two consecutive years and ultimately dropped out. He left school in the first year of upper secondary education to help his family, who had purchased a gas station, and did not resume schooling. He did not begin working out of a need to contribute to household income, but rather out of a personal desire to cover his own expenses. In addition, he used it as an excuse to "escape" from school, which he defines in one word: distance.

He considers financial stability important, stating:

In my head, there are many people who say money doesn't bring happiness, but it does, it brings happiness. It just doesn't bring true friendships. That's what you have

to separate. What money doesn't bring is health, either. It provides you with health insurance, but it's usually what helps you when you need it. But I think everyone needs a life goal. If I get rich, I won't stop working. I'll invest in the future, for my children, for my grandchildren. You have to think about how to reach it. Reached it? Set other stages.

Currently, he still lives with his parents and works at the family gas station, with an intense workload. He works seven days a week and has had only one vacation period in the last four years. His current goal is to become wealthy, and he studies ways to achieve this through the financial market and cryptocurrencies. He intends to have a more comfortable lifestyle and be able to travel.

MARIA'S STORY

Maria is a 22-year-old White woman. She was born in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, the result of an uneventful pregnancy, the couple's second; they already had a two-year-old daughter. Her parents divorced when she was two, and she remained in the city for some time.

When she was four, she, her mother, and her sister moved to Alvorada to live with her grandmother. The house was comfortable and had three bedrooms: one for the grandmother, one for the mother, and one shared by the two sisters. The four were very close and united. Because her mother worked a great deal, the grandmother was responsible for caring for them. The sisters played together often and protected each other when visiting their father, a place where they were not very welcome.

This distant relationship with the father extended throughout the sisters' lives. As children, he did not see them regularly; on many occasions, the girls would be ready and waiting for a father who did not come to pick them up.

Regarding financial support, Maria reports that the father gave what he could, and the mother never demanded more because she disliked conflict and had the support of uncles who provided both financial assistance and "paternal" affection. The father's role was ultimately filled by her stepfather, who entered her life when she was four and treated her as a daughter. She also began living with the stepfather's son from another relationship, whom she considers a brother.

Despite the affection she received, Maria recognizes that the absence of her biological father affected her negatively, because her deep wish was that he would "see her with different eyes." However, she prefers not to blame him, believing he did not receive much love from his own parents and therefore could not offer what he did not have. She chooses the path of forgiveness.

Regarding parents' schooling, her mother and stepfather have incomplete higher education in human resources, and her biological father is a nursing technician. Her mother worked in the administrative area of a private hospital in Porto Alegre. In her schooling trajectory, Maria received substantial support from her stepfather and especially from her mother:

But they were always very connected to that, always encouraged us a lot to study, always encouraged us to read a lot. Every time we passed a grade, my mother would give us a book to encourage us. They were always very supportive of studying. Always helping. "Oh, I can't do this" — and they would go there; when they didn't know, they would look for information to see if they could help. They were really supportive.

Even with all encouragement, Maria, who had attended Gentil School since second year, failed eighth year by three points in mathematics. Her mother was very upset, because she was always present and demanded her daughter's dedication to studies. Although disappointed, her mother did not scold her; she only spoke to her and warned of the consequences of her actions.

For Maria, the repetition was a phase of rebelliousness. She wanted to be like other girls who were not as concerned about school; she wanted to feel she belonged to a group. She suffered bullying in the sixth year for not fitting in with the class. She reveals that she felt excluded, which may have led to a need for peer approval beyond what is common in this age group.

However, this was apparently not the only obstacle. In the interview, she cited difficulty in mathematics. On some occasions, she asked the teacher for help, who suggested that she try to solve the activities on her own. The problem is that her difficulty was so great that she did not even know where to start; she really needed the help that was denied to her.

Despite setbacks, she describes the school as welcoming and says her best school memories were from the period she studied at the TC. At first, she was apprehensive because there were many rumors among students about what the Program was like. Over time, she adapted to and came to like the new reality. She especially remembers the theater group, where she found young people who felt as she did. They formed a good friendship. Through classes, she overcame shyness and improved her expressiveness. The group even performed at a theater company in downtown Porto Alegre.

Participating in the TC brought Maria a new perspective on herself: “So my feeling before was exclusion, both from other teachers and from students, and after the TC I saw that I was seen as someone, as a student.” She liked everything she experienced, all the learning, and the people she met. She would change nothing about the TC. She also believes that if she had not participated, she would not have developed the communication skills she now has. The previously withdrawn girl expressed herself impeccably in the interview and showed great maturity when she said she would change nothing in her life, because everything she lived made her who she is today.

Currently, she is in the fourth semester of an undergraduate degree in psychology with a full scholarship through the University for All Program (Programa Universidade para Todos — PROUNI). She had been working at a Chinese multinational company but resigned due to its sexist culture. Her mother is supporting her financially until she finds another job. She is taking an English course and continues studying psychology only because her tuition is fully covered:

a psychology tuition is one thousand reais, and it's very heavy to pay one thousand reais per month. And I remember that even with a 50% scholarship, I took two courses that cost about 200/300 reais, because five courses cost 700, 900, or more. I can't afford that.

As future projects, she intends to graduate in psychology and pursue training in neuropsychopedagogy to learn more about how children learn. She plans to work with children with disorders or conditions that sometimes make learning difficult at school, such as ADHD and autism. Her intention is to work in schools and support children who, with due differences, experienced learning difficulties as she did.

PAULO'S STORY

Paulo is a mixed-race (Pardo) man aged 21. He lived until age six with his mother, stepfather, and two older sisters in Imbé, on the northern coast of Rio Grande do Sul. The house was simple but improved over time. The family history is turbulent, with back-and-forth dynamics between the father and stepfather in the mother's life. She had a first relationship with the stepfather, which did not work out. She met Paulo's father when she already had a daughter from a third relationship, became pregnant with her second daughter, and left “so as not to ruin the father's life,” because he was 20 and, in her view, too young to assume such a commitment. She returned to the stepfather, who was an alcoholic and assaulted her.

Unable to endure the assaults, the mother separated and entered a new relationship with her daughter's father; they then planned Paulo's birth. They lived together until Paulo was a year old. However, the couple's first daughter did not accept the biological father because she had been raised by the stepfather. The mother, once again, returned to the relationship to avoid hurting her daughter. At that time, the stepfather was in treatment for alcoholism and began treating the mother better, especially when Paulo was three, and it was discovered that she had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

Apart from good memories, most of his recollections are of his mother lying in bed because she had mobility only from the neck up. The middle sister, who should have cared for the mother, mistreated her so she could go out with friends, and Paulo, at age five, often took care of his mother. For this reason, he had to mature very early.

At age six, his mother died, and the boy went to live in Porto Alegre with his father, who until then had visited only on weekends. Even with little time living with his mother, he takes pride in telling his story and remembering how courageous she was. Although she came from a family with financial stability, she had little support from her father because the stepmother disliked her, perhaps because she was Black like her own mother. She had to struggle from early on — selling snacks, cleaning houses, weeding yards, among other activities — to support the two daughters she raised largely alone.

After moving to his father's apartment, Paulo began living with his stepmother and her two children every day. Conflicts within the new family configuration repeat across generations. The stepmother hit him frequently and treated him poorly. He began to show anger in his behavior, became very quiet, and rarely smiled.

With the start of school life, the cycle of violence only intensified. He suffered bullying for being introspective, was repeatedly assaulted at school, heard from his stepmother that "no one gets hit for no reason," and from his older siblings that "if you get hit at school, you will get hit by us at home." He then decided to respond with equally violent behavior:

I started to get angry, started fighting, started seeing that when I fought and hit someone, I got respect, people didn't mess with me anymore, people respected me a bit more. And I started to see that everything I got was through threats, through fighting or humiliating someone, you know? And I grew up the wrong way.

He attended two schools before arriving at Gentil and was expelled from one of them for fighting. After moving to Alvorada, the boy who did not "let things slide" had to find ways to flee when situations became too dangerous and he faced more than one aggressor. The solution he found was parkour. He learned to climb, jump, run, and overcome obstacles with greater agility. He also proved skilled in other sports: handball, football, and athletics. Completely uninterested in theoretical classes, he would leave the classroom and go to the school's open area to play. He failed the sixth year four times. He felt stupid and ashamed for not knowing things his peers considered impossible to get wrong.

Similarly, he would leave home to practice muay thai and *capoeira*, which his father considered dangerous. Even with encouragement from his sister, father, and stepmother to study and with access to books, he did not like reading or studying. His passion was movement. He practiced jiu-jitsu at school with a physical education teacher who taught in the TC.

This teacher observed him and decided to encourage him to practice sports systematically. With the teacher's support, he began training in athletics at the Porto Alegre Gymnastics Society (Sociedade Ginástica de Porto Alegre — SOGIPA) and competing in the Rio Grande do Sul School Games (Jogos Escolares do Rio Grande do Sul — JERGS) representing his school. Over four years

representing SOGIPA, he won the JERGS, went to the Brazilian athletics championship, and qualified for a world championship selection event in Croatia. He traveled to various places in Brazil through sport and received a salary to support his training.

Concurrently, he joined the TC Program, and that is when everything changed in his relationship with school. Classes were dynamic and enjoyable, and conveyed life values, such that “class would end and we wouldn’t want to go home. And at the end of the year, we wanted to fail on purpose to do Trajetórias again.”

The environment created for TC classes helped change the behavior of students who, like Paulo, resolved conflicts through violence. Those who had differences resolved them peacefully. The group became united and helped one another.

After one year in the TC, Paulo progressed from the sixth year of basic education to the first year of upper secondary education. However, returning to regular schooling brought back his lack of interest in monotonous classes, culminating in another failure. SOGIPA began paying private tutors so that he would take only the exams of the National Exam for the Certification of Youth and Adult Skills (Exame Nacional para Certificação de Competências de Jovens e Adultos — ENCCCEJA), and that is how he completed upper secondary education. The desire to pursue higher education was awakened through the TC and made possible by SOGIPA, which granted him a scholarship. Inspired and advised by his TC physical education teacher, he chose to pursue a bachelor’s degree in physical education.

Like the jumps of athletics, Paulo was propelled by the adversities he experienced. He had to confront the fear of the neighborhood “curfew” when returning late from training; he endured injuries during competitions without giving up because he was driven to win. His brother, to whom he was very attached, was murdered at age 26. The next morning, even without sleep, Paulo did one of the best training sessions of his life, according to his coach. After an argument with his stepmother and having nowhere to go, he lived on the street for a week:

And that’s how it went. But I evolved very fast, with this issue of anger, trauma I had, difficult situations I went through, that I always wanted to overcome some trauma I had, by being better.

His determination is motivated by wanting to have his own life and money, make his father proud, and silence the stepmother who said he “would never be anything in life.” However, some events took Paulo off the path of success in sport. The COVID-19 pandemic made training and competitions impossible. He also started dating a girl from a more affluent background and experienced prejudice from her family for being poor. He lost focus in training and began missing sessions. At age 17, he got the girl pregnant, discovered infidelity, and they separated. The ex-girlfriend then attempted suicide by taking medication and miscarried.

The boy who was treated by several psychologists and described himself as emotionally disturbed for not knowing what it was to have a family received the affection and recognition he so needed from his teachers. This relationship of care endures:

Teacher “X” messages me, and teacher “Y” too. Every year, when it’s the date of something we achieved together, they share it on Facebook and tag me. We love each other!

Currently, he lives with a family of friends and is trying to achieve financial stability. Life circumstances and his curiosity led him to learn to speak some of the four languages — English, Spanish, French, and Italian — which he intends to continue studying. He works as a bartender and

waiter, but has held several roles in the restaurant. He realizes he uses TC learnings in his daily work. He plans to resume his physical education degree, which he had to suspend after losing his athletic scholarship. He also intends to take a course to become an officer in the Brazilian Army. He laments not having pursued an athletic career, but hopes to help someone someday, as his physical education teacher once helped him.

LIFE HISTORIES AND SCHOOL HISTORIES: SOME REFLECTIONS

Based on the narratives of the six life histories, several relevant issues can be considered. The reflections begin with the characteristics of the interviewees' family composition. Three participants report paternal abandonment. Abdias does not even know his father's name. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística — IBGE) in 2009 showed that 17.4% of Brazilian families were headed by single mothers. Aragaki (2019) reports that this corresponded to 11.6 million families. At the time, 5.5 million Brazilians had no paternal registration on their birth certificate. The journalist interviewed psychology professor Belinda Mandelbaum (from the Universidade Federal de São Paulo), who identified three forms of parental abandonment: material, intellectual, or affective.

The first two forms of abandonment cited are addressed in Brazil's Penal Code. The latter, affective abandonment, has been the subject of some decisions by the Superior Court of Justice (Superior Tribunal de Justiça — STJ) granting compensation, on the grounds that it breaches the legal duty of care, upbringing, education, and present companionship, implicitly provided for in the 1988 Federal Constitution (Aragaki, 2019).

In none of the cases reported in this study were fathers legally pursued for their absence. On the contrary, some mothers even exempt fathers from responsibility, in a kind of male infantilization. This may be due to a lack of knowledge about relevant rights, but more likely reflects a patriarchal society that, as Aragaki (2019) points out, places women in the exclusive position of child care. The difference in parental responsibility between genders is so great that the IBGE census includes the category "woman without spouse and with children," but does not include "man without spouse and with children."

Another finding that reinforces the consequences of patriarchy is that mothers are identified as primarily responsible for supervising and supporting schooling, even in families where both parents live with the child. Expectations regarding each family member's role again reveal the overload imposed on women.

In this light, the relevance of a support network for raising children is unquestionable, and new family configurations rely on grandparents, uncles, stepfathers, and siblings, as some research participants report. Paternal absence is (perhaps partially) compensated for by another family member.

Regarding household budgets, Abdias, Carolina, and Paulo mention that someone in the family or they themselves resort to informal work to get by. According to the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua — PNAD) conducted by the IBGE in 2022 (*apud* Estatísticas Sociais, 2022a), the informality rate in the labor market was 39.1%, corresponding to 39 million Brazilians. The unemployment rate reached 8.6% of the national population, approximately 9 million people. In Rio Grande do Sul, the unemployment rate was lower than the national average, reaching 6%, but in the Porto Alegre metropolitan region, the index rose to 7.7%.

Furthermore, regarding race, the IBGE study on social inequalities by color or race in Brazil indicates that, across all variables analyzed (employment, income, housing, political representation, security, and education), Black and mixed-race (Pardo) people are at a substantial disadvantage compared to White people (Estatísticas Sociais, 2022b).

In the area of security, the homicide rate for mixed-race (Pardo) people was found to be three times higher than for White people, and the homicide rate for Black people was nearly double that of White people (Estatísticas Sociais, 2022b). In other words, there is a kind of genocide of Black and mixed-race people in Brazil, as French (2017) argues:

In the most resolute terms, Brazil has been regarded as an “uncivil democracy” due to the “combination of a democratic polity and systematic violence against [its] citizens” (Caldeira & Holston, 1999, p. 692), a society in which police abuse predominantly targets the poor and non-white in explicitly racist ways (French, 2017, p. 11).

Regarding education, the data show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Black and mixed-race populations had less provision and access to remote activities than White populations. The attendance rate for the National Upper Secondary Education Exam (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio — ENEM) shows an advantage for White people compared to others, which also appears to have resulted from unequal study conditions during social isolation (Estatísticas Sociais, 2022b).

However, this inequality in the quality of education offered to Black/mixed-race and poor populations was laid bare during the pandemic, but has always existed. The history of education in Brazil since its beginnings makes clear the duality of schooling: one school for the elite, focused on intellectual formation; another for the people, aimed at training labor (Patto, 1993). Despite the emergence of laws over time to ensure universal access to education, even today, elite schools remain privileged and designed to keep that class in power, while schools in peripheral communities are neglected, preventing people from knowing and asserting their rights.

Again, IBGE data show the prevalence of Black and mixed-race students in higher education programs such as pedagogy and nursing, which tend to have lower prestige and financial returns, while medicine is attended by only 3.2% Black students and 21.8% mixed-race students (Estatísticas Sociais, 2022b). Even those who complete this stage suffer from wage inequality: according to the study, White people with a completed higher education degree earned on average 50% more than Black people and 40% more than mixed-race people.

It is noteworthy that the only interviewee currently attending university is Maria, a White woman whose parents also attended higher education. Souza (2019) warns that social classes must be understood beyond economic issues, but above all as sociocultural. We identify with those we love and tend to reproduce their behaviors; class belonging is learned and, in some cases, enables success, while in others it produces failure. Stimuli for reading and imagination, for instance, support school success and later professional success. However:

Children of precarious workers, without the same stimuli for the spirit and who play with their father’s wheelbarrow — a construction laborer — effectively learn, through identification with those they love, to become unskilled manual workers. Difficulty at school is much greater due to the lack of role models at home, condemning students to school failure and, later, to professional failure in the competitive labor market (Souza, 2019, p. 95).

Thus, the high rate of informality in the labor market among Black and mixed-race populations may be linked to precarious conditions of access to and persistence in academic training. In this sense, the data presented reveal part of the inequality experienced by this population. Abdias is the only participant who experienced extreme poverty, and, coincidentally (or not), he is the only one identified as having Black skin.

Schools, in turn, reproduce (and/or contribute to) the racism that exists in society, and interviewees' accounts corroborate this. Milton, for example, suffered bullying because of his facial features, which led to withdrawal and conflicts upon arriving at Gentil School. Carolina, at a very early age, was offended because of her skin color and cried because she did not understand why. She reports instances of verbal aggression for other aspects of her appearance and states she was not supported by teachers. School actions to address the violence Carolina suffered were sporadic and had little or no effect.

When asked about experiences of prejudice because of her skin color, Carolina initially resists and says she never suffered racism, until recalling the school episode. Even then, she seems confused about the roots of the violence. She appears not to grasp the seriousness of what she experienced and perhaps still does not recognize racism when it occurs. Finally, when she speaks about self-acceptance, her tone seems closer to resignation than to self-love.

In sum, accounts of interviewees' childhoods and adolescences reveal a series of violence events suffered, including across generations. Paulo's mother, for example, suffered the stepmother's contempt in a likely case of racism, was distanced from her father's family, needed to work informally to raise her children and have a dignified life, and was a victim of domestic violence in adulthood. Paulo, in turn, also suffered his stepmother's neglect at home and bullying at school. He learned from his siblings that violence is resolved with violence, and this became how he dealt with conflicts. Cases such as this reveal the perpetuation of a cycle of violence.

Therefore, the importance of deep and continuous work by schools is highlighted, both in curbing violence and in cultivating respect for diversity and valuing the different cultures that make up the Brazilian people. Enabling the development of these skills is included in the National Common Core Curriculum (Base Nacional Comum Curricular — BNCC):

to exercise empathy, dialogue, conflict resolution, and cooperation, ensuring respect for oneself and promoting respect for others and for human rights, with welcoming and valuing the diversity of individuals and social groups, their knowledge, identities, cultures, and potential, without prejudice of any kind (Brasil, 2017, p. 10).

Accordingly, it is necessary to promote a culture of peace in schools that involves the entire school community, rather than conducting only sporadic actions. Strategies must be created so that students who have historically been silenced are heard and have their interests considered. One strategy (among others) adopted by Gentil School to change this reality was the TC. Participation in the Program enabled a break in cycles of violence and abandonment experienced by these youth — in the family, at school, and, above all, by the state.

This bond inspires and generates a new cycle: empathy and purpose. Paulo seeks the opportunity to encourage another young person to become a better athlete than he was, representing for someone what his physical education teacher represented in his life. Maria intends to specialize in neuropsychopedagogy to work in schools and support children who, with due differences, experienced learning difficulties as she did.

Yet the people of peripheral communities are sold the fallacious discourse of meritocracy. They come to believe that if they did not succeed in studies, it is because they did not work hard enough. Abdias, for example, blames himself for having moved with his family to another city to work and support the family budget, rather than remaining in Alvorada living with relatives and studying. What he believes was a choice is clearly a condition imposed by the family's extreme poverty. How could he have dedicated himself to studies while his relatives fought for the basic right to eat?

In this way, many children assume adult responsibilities, such as providing for the household or caring for younger siblings. They are denied the right to play, to study, to be children. In this sense,

understanding that social class greatly constrains the opportunities individuals will have is necessary (Souza, 2019).

Another narrative sold to the people is that “money does not bring happiness.” Yet in a capitalist society, money “makes the world go round.” It enables access to quality health care, comfortable housing in a safe location, and access to culture, clothing, etc. Whom does this discourse benefit? Whose interests does a poor person who is resigned and blames themselves for their condition serve? Anísio dreams of becoming wealthy to travel. What he considers a luxury is the basic right to leisure guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. A happy life requires a decent wage — and it is not useful to the elite for the people to be aware of this.

Souza (2019) argues that, since no one chooses the context into which they are born, society should assume responsibility for underserved social classes, as nations that sought equality did in Europe, for example. However:

In our case, popular classes were not simply abandoned. They were humiliated, deceived, had their family formation consciously harmed, and were victims of all kinds of prejudice, whether in slavery or nowadays (Souza, 2019, p. 95).

Finally, it is emphasized that adjusting these young people’s schooling trajectories through an effective public policy brought deep and lasting benefits to their lives. However, it would be imprudent to “romanticize” this, because the accounts clearly show the extraordinary effort participants (and their teachers) needed to make to achieve school “success.” The cases presented here can be considered exceptions within the universe of peripheral youth with multiple grade repetitions. How many students have been left behind along the way? For all these reasons, blaming a peripheral young person for their school failure is among the greatest injustices and violences that society continues to commit.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In view of what has been discussed, it is evident that knowing the life histories of youth from popular classes is a means of understanding each individual’s difficulties and potentialities, while also identifying common points among participants that are similar to those of many others in peripheral communities. Accordingly, the study objective — “to understand the life trajectories and, consequently, the schooling trajectories of peripheral youth with multiple grade repetitions from a school in Alvorada, Rio Grande do Sul” — was achieved through the chosen methodology.

It is concluded that there is a mechanism within Brazilian society that ensures students from peripheral communities fail in school and later in the labor market. Brazilian history shows that from the beginnings of colonization to the present, the elite has dominated different forms of capital (economic, cultural, and social capital of personal relations). The dual education system (one profile for elite schooling and another for the schooling of the people) helps maintain the elite in positions of power and assigns peripheral communities subordinate positions.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

NATÁLIE DOS REIS RODRIGUES holds a PhD in Science Education from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). She is a teacher in the municipal school system of Cachoeirinha/RS. JAQUELINE holds a PhD in Education from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). She is a tenured professor at the Faculty of Education and a collaborating professor in the Postgraduate Program in Science Education: Chemistry of Life and Health at the same institution.

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